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Aids to Religious Teaching

LESSONS
ON THE
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES





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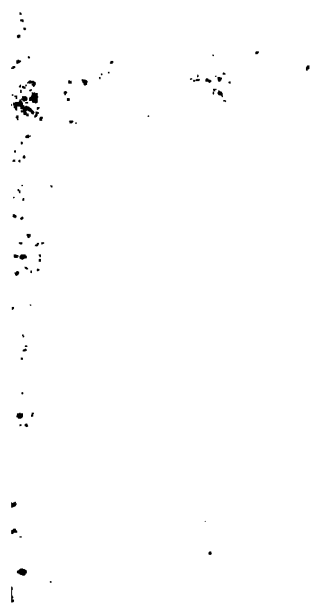
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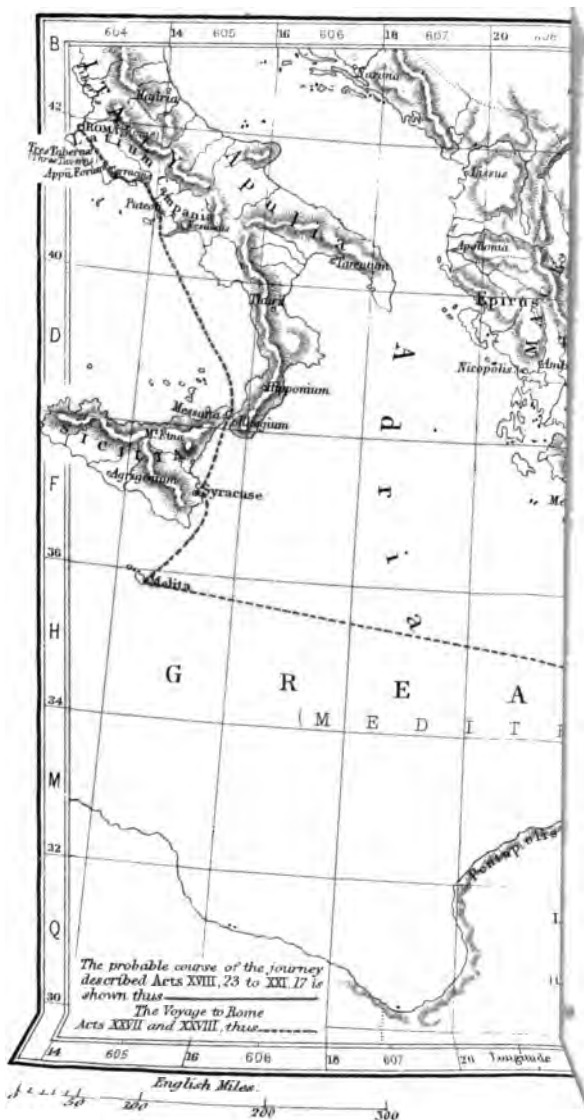






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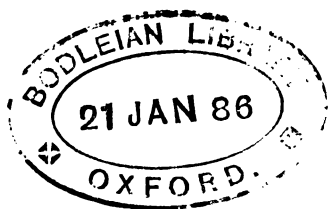
ARRANGED FOR A YEAR'S COURSE

LONDON

CHURCH EXTENSION ASSOCIATION

6 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1885



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Aids to Religious Teaching.

Lessons on the Acts of the Apostles.

NOTE.—These Notes, like those on the Gospels and on the Old Testament, are intended primarily as aids to *Teachers*, and need to be adapted by them to the capacities of their several classes.

LESSON I.

The History of the Kingdom.

Read Acts i. 1-12. Learn Dan. vii. 13, 14 ; S. Mark xvi. 19, 20.

1. *The Head of the Church.*

The tradition of the Church, from the earliest ages, has ascribed this Book to S. Luke, '*the beloved physician*' (Col. iv. 14), the friend and companion of S. Paul, and, perhaps, one of the Seventy sent forth by our LORD to announce His coming (S. Luke x. 1).

S. Luke has written two Books in the New Testament. In '*the former Treatise*' (his Gospel) he gives us an account of what '*Jesus began both to do and teach*' while visibly present on earth. The Acts of the Apostles are, as it were, the sequel to his Gospel, unfolding to us the doors of heaven, and revealing our ascended LORD and Saviour sitting in glory at the right hand of the Father, and there continuing '*to do and teach,*' no longer within the narrow limits of one country, or during the few years of an earthly ministry, b

in 'Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth,' by the instrumentality of the Apostles and their successors, the bishops and priests of His Church, through the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

The Acts of the Apostles form the first page of the history of CHRIST'S Kingdom, the Church, showing us how CHRIST directs all from within the Veil. It was He who filled up the number of the Apostles (ch. i. 24), and shed forth upon them His promised Spirit (ch. ii. 33), adding to the Church daily '*those that were being saved*' (ch. ii. 47). It was their ascended King who heard and answered the prayers of His faithful people (ch. iv. 31), revealing Himself visibly from time to time (ch. vii. 55; ix. 3), guiding the journeyings of His Apostles (ch. xvi. 7), going before them now in His triumphs, as before in His sufferings (S. Mark x. 32). It was He who bade S. Philip accost the Ethiopian stranger (ch. viii. 26, 29), and commanded S. Peter to eat bread with a Roman soldier (ch. x. 13; xi. 3). It was He who gathered together a Gentile Church at Antioch (ch. xi. 21, 22), and overruled S. Paul's plans, sending him into Europe when he would fain have stayed in Asia (ch. xvi. 6-10), thus guiding His Church in its onward progress from Jerusalem to Rome, the capital of the world.

What CHRIST did for His Church in the days of the Apostles, that He is doing still,—ordering and disposing all things by the agency and teaching of duly ordained and divinely appointed ministers, for the gradual extension of His Kingdom on earth, until its full and final triumph, when the '*earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*' (Is. xi. 9).

There, at the right hand of the Father, JESUS CHRIST reigns as our King, and will continue to reign until the end. There He teaches, and will continue to teach, as our Prophet. There He, who as our Priest offered Himself upon the cross, and afterwards ascended into heaven, the true Holy of *Holies*, abideth still a Priest for ever, to make intercession for us (*Heb. vii. 25*).

(The Acts may be divided into four parts :—1st, chs. i. to vii., in which is related the foundation of the Church at Jerusalem ;—2nd, chs. viii. to xii., describing the first extension of the Church beyond the limits of the Jewish nation ;—3rd, chs. xiii. to xix., narrating the missionary journeys of S. Paul ;—4th, chs. xx. to xxviii., showing the course of events which brought him to Rome, the capital of the world.)

2. *The Chosen Witnesses* (v. 1-8).

As our Blessed LORD waited forty days after His birth before being presented in the Temple in the earthly Jerusalem, and again forty days after His baptism before entering upon His ministry, so now He waits forty days after His resurrection before presenting Himself in the Temple of the heavenly Jerusalem, to become our Great High Priest within the Veil.

During this time He was not continuously visible to His disciples. He appeared to them at frequent intervals, giving them many infallible proofs of the reality of His resurrection (S. Luke xxiv. 39, 43 ; S. John xx. 27 ; xxi. 13), teaching them all that it was needful for them to know concerning His Church, the '*Kingdom of God*,' and giving them power to act for Him as His representatives on earth.

He also bade them not to depart from Jerusalem until they had received '*the promise of the Father*,' that baptism of the Holy Ghost which should give them power to carry out their great commission.

Even now, the Apostles were far from understanding the spiritual nature of CHRIST's Kingdom. The question, '*LORD, wilt Thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?*' shows that they still hoped for the restoration of a temporal kingdom. Our LORD's reply teaches us that we are not to inquire curiously concerning that which God has seen fit to hide from us ; He turns away their thoughts from a temporal sovereignty to their true calling, to be witnesses w

Him, for His Kingdom was to be extended through *suffering*, and not through temporal honours and dignities.

3. *The Throne of Glory* (v. 9-12).

Picture the scene on Mount Olivet. Perhaps on the very spot where He began His triumphal entry into the earthly Jerusalem, there the risen Saviour begins His triumphal entry into the heavenly Jerusalem. With adoring wonder the Apostles see Him slowly lifted up from earth, His hands still outstretched in blessing, until a cloud receives Him out of their sight. And while they gaze steadfastly up and listen for the echo of the angels' song of triumph, lo ! two messengers in white apparel stand beside them, sent by the King of Glory with words of hope and comfort to those He has left on earth. That same JESUS should one day return in like manner as they had seen Him go into heaven, coming in the clouds with power and great glory (Dan. vii. 13 ; S. Matt. xxvi. 64). No wonder they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy (S. Luke xxiv. 52). Had He not said, '*If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice because I said, I go unto My Father*' (S. John xiv. 28) ; and again, '*A little while and ye shall not see Me, and again a little while and ye shall see Me,*' and '*Where I am, there shall also My servant be*' (S. John xii. 26 ; xvi. 16) ! They no longer felt that they had lost a Friend, but rather that He was nearer than ever, even though His visible presence was withdrawn.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. Our life on earth is, as it were, a forty days' probation. As our LORD appeared and disappeared many times during the period between His resurrection and ascension, so during our earthly pilgrimage there are times when He specially manifests Himself to the soul, and makes us conscious of His presence ; sometimes as to the disciples when engaged in prayer (S. John xx. 19-26), at other times during our *daily work* (S. John xxi. 2-13), or when in trouble and perplexity (S. Luke xxiv. 13-32) ; so that wherever we are, and

whatever may be our work, we should be always mindful of His presence and listening for His voice.

2. The Apostles showed their joy and gratitude by continually praising and blessing God in the Temple, and we should show our joy and thankfulness to our ascended LORD by lifting up our hearts more and more from earth,—setting our affections on things above, and worshipping Him continually on His altar throne.

3. CHRIST works by human instrumentality. We, as Christians, are bound to labour for the extension of His Kingdom, and to do all in our power by leading a holy life, by frequent intercessions, by words spoken in season, by teaching and example, to win souls to Him.

Note.—For Lessons on the Great Forty Days and on the Ascension, see Lessons on the Gospel History, xxvii. and xxviii.

LESSON II.

The Days of Expectation.

Read Acts i. 13-26. Learn Exod. iii. 5 ; Rev. iii. 11.

1. *The Nine Days' Retreat* (v. 13, 14).

What a hallowed spot was that Upper Chamber at Jerusalem (v. 13), the first Christian Church! Belonging to one of the disciples—perhaps to Nicodemus, or Joseph of Arimathea—it had been placed at our LORD's disposal on the eve of the Passover (S. Luke xxii. 10-13), and had now become the head-quarters of the little band of disciples, the germ of the Catholic Church, the grain of mustard-seed, which was one day to grow into a great tree and overshadow the whole earth.

How full of sweet and sacred associations was that Upper Room! Here JESUS had eaten the last Passover before He suffered—here He had washed the disciples' feet—here the first Eucharist had been celebrated, and the Apostles had received their first Communion. Here, too, He had prepared them for His departure, and taught them about the coming and the mission of the Comforter—here, under the figure of the Vine and its Branches, had been unfolded the mystery of the Sacramental union between the Great Head of the Church and its various members. Here, too, the disciples had gazed in joy and admiration on the '*King in His beauty*,' and adored their risen LORD. Here He had eaten and drank with them after His resurrection, and showed *them His sacred wounds*, and permitted them to touch Him. *Here He had breathed on them the gift of the Holy Ghost, and given to His Church the power to forgive sins in His*

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condition of having been witnesses of the whole three years' ministry—Joseph, called Barsabas, surnamed Justus, and Matthias. But which of these two should it be? The Holy Spirit, who was to guide them into all truth, was not yet given; the Apostles had not yet received power to ordain. In their perplexity they turn to their ascended LORD, and give utterance to the first recorded prayer of the infant Church, '*Thou, LORD, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen*' (v. 24). Then, in entire faith in His guidance, they gave forth their lots, and the name of Matthias came forth in answer to their prayer.

(In giving the '*lots*,' the names were probably written on two tablets, which were shaken in an urn, or in the lap of a robe (Prov. xvi. 33); he whose lot first fell out was chosen. The disciples did not look upon this as a selection by *chance*; it was in old times a very usual way of ascertaining the will of God (Numb. xxvi. 55). The account of the death of Judas, given in v. 18, differs from that in S. Matt. xxvii. 5. It is commonly supposed that, in the attempt to hang himself, Judas fell over the steep rocks in the very '*potter's field*' which was bought by the chief priests with the price of blood.)

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. The gates of hell shall never prevail against the Church of CHRIST. Satan imagined he had triumphed when he had dislodged one of the foundation stones of the Church. But his triumph was of short duration. When Judas forfeited his inheritance, the gap was filled up by the election of S. Matthias. God's purposes cannot fail of their accomplishment. There will be no empty thrones in heaven—the ranks of the fallen angels will probably be filled by the saints.

And as with the Church at large, so with individuals. Each has a special vocation, special gifts, special opportunities, and a special reward hereafter; but if any through their own fault forfeit their inheritance, God will appoint *another to fulfil His purpose, and carry out His will.*

2. The glory of God should be our chief aim and desire. The thought of the glory of their ascended LORD filled the Apostles' hearts with joy. By the contemplation of His ascension they were drawn into a life of closer communion with Him than they had enjoyed when He was their Companion on earth.

3. The first mark of the Church is *unity*; the disciples continued '*with one accord*' in prayer. Are we doing all in our power to promote the *unity* of CHRIST's Church?

4. The outpouring of the Holy Ghost was preceded by a season of retirement and prayer. The Church has appointed certain seasons of fasting and prayer before her great festivals: Advent, as a preparation for Christmas; Lent, before Easter; the Rogation days, before Ascension Day. What use do we make of these holy seasons?

LESSON III.

The Birthday of the Church.

Read Acts ii. 1-21. Learn Ps. civ. 30 ; Ezek. xxxvii. 9, 10.

1. *The Ingathering of the Harvest.*

Seven weeks have passed away since that first Easter morning when the holy women returned to the Upper Room, after their early visit to the sepulchre, bringing the joyful news that '*the LORD had risen indeed.*'

Again the streets of Jerusalem are thronged with multitudes of strangers from distant lands, who are about to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, so called from its being the fiftieth day after the Passover.

Pentecost was one of the three great Jewish feasts (Exod. xxiii. 14-17 ; Lev. xxiii. 15-22 ; Numb. xxviii. 26-31 ; Deut. xvi. 9-12) ; it was sometimes called the '*feast of harvest*' or '*the feast of weeks,*' and was instituted as a thanksgiving for the ingathering of the harvest. It also commemorated the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, which took place on the fiftieth day after the departure out of the land of Egypt.

This festival, therefore, prefigured the descent of the Holy Ghost, who was to write the new law of God—not on tables of stone, but on the tables of the heart (Jer. xxxi. 33 ; 2 Cor. iii. 3 ; Heb. viii. 10) ; and also the ingathering of *the firstfruits of the great harvest of souls*, which was to *take place on the first Whitsun-day* (Acts ii. 41). (For

further teaching on the three great feasts, see Lessons on Old Testament History, 1st Series, Lesson XLIII.)

2. *The LORD and Giver of Life.*

Early on the morning of this great festival, the little band of disciples again assembled for their daily worship, when suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind; while it filled all the house where they were sitting; while, at the same time, over the head of each there appeared as it were a separate flame of light resting upon them. Each countenance beams with heavenly light and joy; each tongue utters exclamations of praise to God; for under these outward symbols, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the promised Gift, the LORD and Giver of life, has descended, never to leave His Church, but to abide with her for ever, guiding her into all truth (S. John xiv. 16, 17; xvi. 13).

The sound of the rushing mighty wind is heard throughout the city, and multitudes come running together to inquire the cause. Filled with the Holy Ghost, and suddenly endowed with power to speak in many strange languages, the disciples go forth from the Upper Room burning with desire to make known to all men *'the wonderful works of God.'* The crowds assembling for the Temple service, for it was the third hour of the day, nine o'clock; the time of the morning sacrifice, are filled with amazement to hear these ignorant and unlearned Galileans chanting the praises of God in divers languages. They gather round them with murmurs of wonder and admiration, exclaiming with amazement, *'Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?'* While the foreign Jews express their astonishment and admiration, the Jews of Jerusalem, not understanding the strange sounds, try to turn the Apostles into ridicule, and impiously proclaim that the disciples are intoxicated (v. 13).

Then S. Peter, inspired by the Holy Ghost, and burning with zeal and courage in his Master's cause, comes forward with the Eleven, and, addressing the astonished crowd, bold

denies the charge. He calls to their remembrance the prophecy of Joel (ch. ii. 28, 29), and tells them that this prophecy is even now being fulfilled before their eyes ; that these are the '*last days*,' in which God, according to His promise, is pouring out His Spirit upon all flesh, men and women, young and old alike (v. 14-21).

3. *Ordinary and Extraordinary Gifts.*

The Holy Ghost is the '*LORD and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified*' (Nicene Creed).

These words express a great mystery, far too deep for us to attempt to understand ; but, like all other mysteries of the Catholic Faith, we believe it because God has revealed it. He is the '*Breath of Life*' breathed into the Church on the first Whitsun-day, and working ever since, through appointed means of grace and sacramental channels. He comes personally to dwell in each of us at our baptism, and breathes into our souls that Divine life which was lost through the Fall (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17 ; vi. 19). He not only *imparts*, but also *sustains* that Divine life by means of the Sacraments.

We read of two kinds of gifts poured out upon the Church by the Holy Ghost—*ordinary* and *extraordinary* gifts (1 Cor. xii., xiii., xiv.). Extraordinary gifts are those powers which at different times have been poured out upon the Church, or upon certain individuals for a special purpose. Such were the powers which accompanied the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. The gifts of working miracles, and speaking many languages, were the outward visible signs by which men might see, and hear, and be persuaded of the mystery of the personal presence of God the Holy Ghost in His Church, and in the hearts of men.

These gifts are not necessary to salvation ; they were given to the early Church, and have in other ages been bestowed on missionaries and pioneers of the Faith, in order that the *heathen among whom they laboured* might be better able

to understand, and more easily led to receive the Faith. Ordinary gifts are those given to all Christians, according to their capacity to receive them. Such are faith, hope, and charity, implanted by the Holy Ghost in Holy Baptism, and further developed by His seven-fold gifts in Confirmation.

4. *Signs and Symbols.*

The outward signs by which the Holy Ghost manifested His presence on the Day of Pentecost represent His inward work in the soul. He came '*suddenly*,' for His inspirations are often felt when least expected.

'*The rushing mighty wind*' represents His invisible, mysterious working, and also His life-giving power, breathing Divine grace into our hearts, and filling every part of the Church with His presence, as the wind filled the whole house (S. John iii. 8 ; Ezek. xxxvii. 9, 10).

The '*tongues like as of fire*' denote the cleansing, enlightening, purifying work of the Holy Ghost, inflaming the soul with the love of God, and enabling it to make known to others the Gospel of Salvation (S. Matt. iii. 11 ; 1 Cor. vi. 11 ; Heb. xii. 29).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. To pray continually for a more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit, both on our own souls and on those of others (Cant. iv. 16), asking Him to purify us from sin, to *enlighten* our understanding, to *enkindle* our will, and to lift up our hearts to the love and contemplation of heavenly things.

2. As the rushing mighty wind filled every part of the house, so should we ask the Holy Spirit to sanctify every part of our being by His indwelling presence, that our memory, imagination, intellect, affections and will, may be consecrated wholly to God's service.

3. The Holy Ghost is our Guide in the way that leads to eternal life. If we follow His guidance we shall reach our

heavenly home in safety ; but if we refuse to be led by Him, and shut our ears to His gentle, pleading voice—if we follow our own way instead of the path He points out—He will at last leave us to ourselves, and we shall be shut out for ever from the presence of God. We must always watch and pray, lest we ‘*grieve*’ (Eph. iv. 30), ‘*resist*’ (Acts vii. 51), or finally ‘*quench*’ (1 Thess. v. 19) that Holy Spirit who has made us His dwelling-place (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17).

LESSON IV.

The First Christian Sermon.

Read Acts ii. 22-40. Learn Psalm cxlvii. 18; S. John xvi. 8.

1. *Christ Crucified, Risen, Ascended, Glorified* (v. 22-36).

Picture the excited crowd listening with breathless attention to the first great Christian sermon which is being preached in the streets of Jerusalem. What a mighty change has already been effected by the descent of the Holy Ghost! S. Peter, who, only a few weeks ago, had trembled at the voice of a servant-maid, and had denied his Master with oaths and curses, now boldly proclaims the resurrection and exaltation of Him whom that multitude had rejected and crucified. And among those thousands of awe-struck listeners, how many may there have been, who, at the last solemn feast at Jerusalem, only seven weeks before, had joined in the awful cry, '*Crucify! crucify! we have no king but Cæsar!*'

S. Peter begins his sermon by recalling the life and death of that JESUS of Nazareth whose miracles, wonders, and signs wrought in their midst had testified to His Divine power. He builds His call to repentance on the facts of His life and death, His descent into hell, His resurrection and ascension. He proves to them from prophecy that this JESUS is indeed the Messiah of whom David prophesied when he said, '*Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption*' (Ps. xvi. 8-11).

David could not have been speaking of himself in this Psalm, for all men knew that he both died and was buried

and that his sepulchre was in Jerusalem at that very time. JESUS of Nazareth fulfilled this prophecy; death had no power over Him; S. Peter, together with the other Apostles, were His witnesses to attest the truth of His resurrection.

But a yet further mystery remains to be unfolded. The risen LORD is also their ascended Saviour. The Apostles are witnesses, not only of His glorious resurrection, but also of His triumphant ascension, and this also David had prophesied of the Messiah: '*The LORD said unto my LORD, Sit Thou on My right hand until I make Thy foes Thy footstool*' (Ps. cx. 1).

He, whom they in their blindness had crucified as a common malefactor, was even now exalted above the heavens, at the right hand of the Father, and from His throne of glory had poured out upon them the promised gift of the Holy Ghost.

As with Joseph of old (Gen. xlv. 5), God had overruled their wicked designs for the accomplishment of His own purposes in the redemption of man. It was by the '*determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*' that He had been delivered up to be crucified (v. 23), their guilt not being lessened from the circumstance that God had overruled their crime to the carrying out of His Divine purposes.

2. *The Holy Ghost the Convincer of Sin* (v. 37-40).

S. Peter's words went straight to the hearts of his hearers. As of old the Spirit brooded over the waters, and darkness gave place to light, so now that same Holy Spirit lifted the veil from the hearts of this multitude, and revealed to them the awful truth that they had been guilty of shedding the blood of their Saviour and their God.

With what tremendous force must their own sentence upon themselves have come back at that moment: '*His blood be upon us and on our children,*' and how wonderfully, through the infinite compassion of God, was that curse now turned into a blessing!

Pierced with true contrition, stung with remorse at the

awfulness of their crime, the multitude crowded round S. Peter and the rest of the Apostles with the anxious inquiry, '*Brethren, what shall we do?*' (v. 37.)

Then the way of salvation is pointed out to those sin-stained souls.

There was hope and pardon for all, even for those who had crucified the Son of God, for the '*Blood of JESUS CHRIST cleanseth from all sin.*' Only they must accept the conditions offered, before they could receive pardon and peace. *Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of JESUS CHRIST, unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost* (v. 38, 39).

The blessed change was begun, but *conviction* of sin was not enough; there must be real change of heart—a true *conversion* or turning to God—and real repentance, before they could be received into covenant with God in Holy Baptism and become regenerate—sharers in this blessed gift of the Holy Ghost, who should be poured forth upon them, and upon their children, and upon all who were afar off, '*even as many as the LORD our GOD shall call unto Him.*'

3. *Pardon and peace* (v. 41).

Great indeed was the result of that first Christian sermon; marvellous was the working of the blessed Spirit upon that multitude—three thousand souls pricked to the heart—three thousand anxious inquirers—three thousand willing to own their guilt, and to proclaim their belief that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth was their LORD and Saviour—three thousand gathered into the fold by Holy Baptism on that first Whitsun-day.

What a glorious promise and encouragement for the future extension of the Church! Imagine the song of praise and thanksgiving which ascended before the Throne of God from that hallowed Upper Room on that most memorable festival.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. The Christian religion is not founded upon abstract virtues, but on devotion to a living Person—the Person of the Incarnate Son of God. The mysteries of His incarnation, birth, life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and the consequent outpouring of the Holy Ghost, and extension of the Incarnation through the Sacraments, form the basis upon which the spiritual life must be built up.

2. God often chooses to work by means of the humblest instruments. He chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (1 Cor. i. 27–29), that none should glory in any fancied wisdom or cleverness they may possess, but trust entirely in the almighty power of God.

3. Conviction of sin is not enough ; unless it lead to true repentance it would end in despair, as with Judas. It must be followed by true and sincere repentance, consisting of contrition (a loving sorrow for having offended God), confession (the humble and sincere acknowledgment of sin), *and amendment of life*, together with such reparation for the past as lies in our power.

LESSON V.

The Infancy of the Church.

Read Acts ii. 41-47. Learn S. Matt. xix. 21 ; Acts ii. 42.

1. *Holy Baptism.*

The chief thing our Blessed LORD taught His Apostles during the great Forty Days between His resurrection and His ascension was how to found the Christian Church (S. Matt. xxviii. 19 ; S. Mark xvi. 15, 16), so that when the anxious inquiry, '*Brethren, what shall we do?*' was caught up and repeated by three thousand lips, S. Peter and the Apostles were at no loss for an answer.

They did not bid that eager, anxious multitude quiet their consciences by simply making an act of faith in the finished work of their crucified Redeemer ; it was not enough even to repent of the past, and to join in worshipping and loving Him whom they had hitherto persecuted and despised. There was but one way of salvation, one means of entrance into that Kingdom which CHRIST came to establish, and that was through Holy Baptism, by which they would obtain remission of sin and be incorporated into His mystical Body, and become heirs through hope of everlasting life. What a scene ! Three thousand men, women, and little children all eagerly pressing forward to join the ranks of the Church Militant, and profess their readiness to confess CHRIST crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil.

Perhaps, as one after another confessed his need of cleansing from sin (S. Matt. iii. 6), and professed his belief in JESUS of Nazareth as the Son of God (Acts viii. 37 ; xxii. 16) before being admitted to Baptism, S. Peter and the rest of the Apostles would remember that morning, only a few

weeks before, when, in obedience to the Master's voice, they had let down the net and then were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes (S. John xxi. 6).

How full of peace and joy was every baptized convert in that little community—his past sins washed away, his past life, as it were, dead and buried (Rom. vi. 4 ; Col. ii. 12) ; he was regenerated, sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. iii. 16), born again of water and of the Spirit, and thus admitted into the Kingdom of God (S. John iii. 3, 5).

(The ideal and perfect mode of Baptism is by immersion, the going down into and under the water, and the coming forth to a new life. See Rubric in Office of Holy Baptism. In cold climates, pouring water upon the child has become generally substituted, and in this first and greatest of baptismal services it was no doubt administered in this form, for it would not have been possible to baptize three thousand by immersion in one day in Jerusalem. Renunciation of sin, and professions of faith were required of candidates for Holy Baptism probably from Apostolic times. S. Peter's expression, the '*answer of a good conscience*,' 1 Peter iii. 21, probably refers to the question put to candidates for baptism).

2. Distinguishing Marks of the Early Church.

The zeal and fervour of these first converts were manifested by an *outward* as well as an *inward* change of life. '*They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine.*' The Ministry of the Church consisted at this time of two degrees, the *Twelve* and the *Seventy*,—the first bishops and priests of the Church, who had been ordained by CHRIST Himself (S. Mark iii. 13, 14 ; S. Luke x. 1 ; S. John xx. 22, 23). Baptism is but the beginning of the Christian life.

CHRIST had bidden His disciples not only *baptize* but *teach* those who were baptized, to observe and do all that He had commanded them (S. Matt. xxviii. 20). Probably the majority of these new converts were Jews from foreign parts who had heard little or nothing of the life and death of JESUS of Nazareth. With what awe and wonder must they have *listened to the mysteries* of that wondrous life, passion, death,

resurrection, and ascension, as they were unfolded to them by those who had been eye-witnesses of His three years' ministry, —the companions of JESUS ! What a new light was shed on types and prophecies as they saw how all things that were written of the Messiah had been literally fulfilled in the person of the crucified and ascended JESUS ! Perhaps these early Christians may have been taught the main facts of the Christian Faith in that very form of the Apostles' Creed which has come down to us from Apostolic times. (That there was some such distinct creed or form of doctrine in Apostolic times is evident from Rom. vi. 17 ; 2 Tim. i. 13 ; Heb. x. 23, and many other passages.)

They were also steadfast in the Apostles' *fellowship* or communion ; bound together as one family ; realising that as '*members of CHRIST*,' baptized into one body (1 Cor. xii. 13), they must be united (Eph. iv. 3-6), caring one for another (Rom. xii. 15), loving one another (1 John iv. 7-11).

The third distinguishing mark of the early Church was the '*breaking of bread*.' So long as the Temple stood, they attended daily those public services to which they had been accustomed from their childhood ; yet their chief act of worship was the daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist in that sacred Upper Chamber, where the Holy Ghost had just been outpoured, and which was hallowed by so many sacred associations.

Lastly, they continued steadfast in '*the prayers*,'—that is, common worship at regular stated times. (It is thought that the expression '*the prayers*' implies some special liturgical form of prayer.)

3. *Community Life.*

No doubt it was in imitation of the life led by our Blessed LORD and His Apostles that these early Christians in their first love and fervour '*had all things common*.' They parted with their possessions that they might the more resemble Him who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, and they laid their riches at the feet of the Apostles.

that they might distribute to every man according to his need (ch. iv. 35).

Great was the impression made upon the outside world by the daily life, the harmony and singleness of heart of the infant Church. They saw with astonishment the rich rejoicing in the privilege of being able to minister to CHRIST in His poor,—while the poor ate their meat with gladness and thankfulness, untroubled by anxious cares and anxieties for the morrow. The great Head of the Church blessed the faithful ministry of His servants by adding daily to the Church *‘those that were being saved’* (Revised Version). (The work of salvation was begun, but needed perseverance ; they had set their foot on the right road and were heirs through hope of salvation ; but of none can it be said they *‘are saved,’* until this time of probation is over, since it is always possible in this life to fall away from grace. Baptism brings us into a *‘state of salvation,’* but we need to pray continually that *‘we may continue in the same unto our life’s end.’*)

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. To hold the Faith like the early Christians, in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. To accept as they did, with unquestioning faith, the *teaching* of the Church, for she is the living voice of the Holy Ghost, and therefore cannot err.

2. As members of CHRIST’s mystical Body we should be always ready to feel for and minister to one another, and count it a joy and a privilege to part with our possessions in order to minister to CHRIST in His poor.

3. To imitate the early Christians by a frequent attendance at God’s altar, and a devout use of all means of grace.

4. Like the early Christians, to serve GOD with *‘singleness of heart’* ; our one motive His love, our one rule His will, our one aim His glory ; and like them to praise Him continually for the riches of His grace towards us.

LESSON VI.

The Name of Healing.

Read Acts iii. Learn Cant. i. 3 ; Phil. ii. 9-11.

1. *The Hour of Prayer* (v. 1-3).

It is three o'clock in the afternoon, the hour of the evening sacrifice, and among the crowd who are approaching the Temple are S. Peter and S. John, for the early Christians at Jerusalem observed the Jewish laws and ordinances until the destruction of the Temple. (There were three hours of prayer among the Jews ; the third hour, 9 a.m. ; the sixth hour, noon ; and the ninth hour, 3 p.m.—Ps. lv. 17 ; Dan. vi. 10.)

At the Beautiful Gate of the Temple—probably the magnificent Eastern Gate, covered with massive plates of silver and gold, and leading from the Court of the Gentiles to the Court of the Women—there lay a poor cripple, who must have been well known to all who frequented the Temple services, for, all his life, he appears to have been carried to that corner of the gateway, to ask alms of those who entered the Temple.

The poor man was above forty years old, and had therefore been in Jerusalem all the time that our Lord went about doing good, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Perhaps two years before, when Jesus walked in the Temple in Solomon's Porch (S. John x. 23), He may have seen this poor cripple lying there, and yet no gracious word of healing fell from His lips. But if He appeared not to notice him, it was not really so ; the impotent

man was to be made whole in due time, and the seeming delay would be for his own good, and for the greater glory of the sacred name of JESUS.

2. *The Name of JESUS CHRIST* (v. 3-11).

As the two Apostles approached, the poor cripple asked an alms of them, as he had already done of so many other worshippers. To S. Peter and to the rest of the Apostles was given the power of '*discerning of spirits*' (1 Cor. xii. 10 ; Acts v. 3, 9) ; and seeing that this man had faith to be healed, he looked at him steadfastly, saying, '*Look on us.*' The man '*gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them,*' thus giving proof of his obedience and faith. '*Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. In the name of JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth, rise up and walk*' (v. 6).

This is the proclamation of the power claimed and exercised by the Church. Worldly power and individual power are alike disclaimed ('*as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk*'—v. 12) ; her miracles are wrought, her power is derived, solely from the authority, and in the name of JESUS CHRIST. The healing power is His alone, but to His Church is entrusted the application of that power.

As S. Peter uttered these words, he took the poor helpless cripple by the right hand and raised him up, thus supplying the needful power to enable him to obey the command, '*Rise up and walk;*' and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. (S. Luke, as a physician, describes exactly the process of his cure.) He sprang joyously to his feet, and was seen by the astonished multitude standing, leaping, walking, and entering the Temple with the Apostles, praising and blessing God in a loud voice for his cure.

3. *The Discourse in Solomon's Porch* (v. 12-26).

Again the awe-struck multitude gather round the Apostles, marvelling at the strange power of these poor

ignorant fishermen of Galilee. And, as a few days before in the streets of Jerusalem, so now in the great cloister or Porch of Solomon, S. Peter proclaims the glory of the risen LORD. It was His Name, through faith in His Name, that had made this man strong, and restored him to perfect soundness (v. 16). The Holy One and the Just, whom they had denied before Pilate, and rejected and slain, was, indeed, the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken. Earnestly and forcibly the Apostle bids them repent and be converted, that their sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the LORD, and that the second coming of the LORD JESUS, who shall restore all things, may be hastened (v. 19-21).

(These words are still applicable to the Jewish people. In them the Holy Spirit declares the solemn truth that the time of the second advent of CHRIST and the restitution of all things are by Divine wisdom connected with the repentance of the Jews, and their reception of the Gospel message of salvation—*comp.* Rom. xi. 25-27 ; Zech. xii. 10 ; xiii. xiv.)

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. The lame man lying outside the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, represents our condition by nature, diseased and helpless, in consequence of the Fall, and unable of ourselves to enter the heavenly temple. If we would be cured, we must exercise the faith and obedience of this lame man. As he grasped with eager faith S. Peter's outstretched hand, and by so doing was enabled to do what would have been impossible if attempted in his own strength, so may we, by a faithful use of the Divine power supplied by Sacraments and means of grace, obtain healing and strength, and rise up from habits of sin to walk in newness of life, praising and blessing GOD, and making known to others the power and sweetness of the sacred name of JESUS.

2. GOD is always more ready to hear than we are to pray and is wont to give more than either we desire or deserve.

If our petitions appear to remain unanswered, it is not really so ; in due time we shall reap if we faint not, and in His own time and way GOD will surely bestow upon us far greater blessings than those we asked for.

3. The name of JESUS is still as ointment poured forth ; it has lost none of its sweetness and healing power. The Church on earth is as it were the gate of the heavenly temple, the place of healing, the porch of the true Solomon, the Prince of Peace ; and those who make known the sweetness and power of that Name to others, and minister to their spiritual or temporal necessities, shall one day enter with them into the heavenly temple, where suffering and sorrow shall be for ever at an end.

4. We should honour the sacred name of JESUS, always bowing our heads or bending our knees when it is said. *'We worship Thy name, ever world without end.'*

LESSON VII.

The Arrest of S. Peter and S. John.

Read Acts iv. 1-31. Learn v. 12, 19, 20 ; S. John xv. 19, 20.

1. *Imprisonment* (v. 1-4).

S. Peter's sermon was rudely interrupted. While he unfolded to the listening multitude the meaning of those types and prophecies with which they had been familiar from their childhood, and pointed out how sacrifice and prophecy spoke of a *suffering* Messiah, setting before them the blessedness of those who should receive Him, and the eternal woe of those who should reject Him (ch. iii. 22-26), the priests, who had been busy with the evening sacrifice, together with the captain of the Levite guard, whose duty it was to keep order in the Temple, and the Sadducees, who taught that there is no resurrection, came upon the two Apostles, arrested them, and threw them into prison, there to await the assembling of the Sanhedrim, or great Council of the Jewish Church.

Joyfully and willingly, we may be sure, did the two Apostles suffer persecution for CHRIST's sake. Had not their Master foretold that they should suffer for His Name's sake ? (S. Matt. x. 22 ; xxiv. 9 ; xxiii. 34 ; S. John xv. 21.) And was it not their highest privilege to be called to tread in His footsteps ? (S. Matt. x. 24, 25 ; S. John xv. 18-20.) Their enemies could not hinder the extension of CHRIST's kingdom ; many among those who had listened that day to S. Peter's words believed (v. 4), and, undeterred by the

arrest of the Apostles, joined the Christian community, which now numbered no less than five thousand converts.

2. *Trial* (v. 5-12).

Special care seems to have been taken to secure a large gathering of the Sanhedrim on the morrow. All who were of the high-priestly race attended. They were Sadducees, and therefore bitterly hostile to the doctrine of the Resurrection, for they foresaw that their own influence with the people would be lessened if the Apostles succeeded in convincing them of the resurrection of CHRIST.

Before this assembly of elders, priests, and learned scribes, presided over by Annas, the High Priest, and head of the Jewish Church, stand the two unlettered fishermen of Galilee; and the question is solemnly asked, '*By what power or by what Name have ye done this?*' (v. 7).

They are standing on the very spot where, not many months before, their Master stood, blindfolded, insulted, mocked, and pronounced guilty of death; on the very spot where S. Peter himself had, through fear of prison and death, denied his LORD. What thoughts must have filled their minds as they met the scowling glances of Annas and Caiaphus! with what joy must S. Peter have accepted this glorious opportunity of making reparation for the past, by boldly confessing CHRIST before that same High Priest and Sanhedrim which had witnessed his denial! 'There is no fear, no hesitation now. Boldly and triumphantly S. Peter, '*filled with the HOLY GHOST,*' proclaims to '*the rulers of the people, and the elders of Israel,*' that '*in the name of JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom GOD raised from the dead, even in Him doth this man stand here before you whole.*'

The question of the Sanhedrim implied that the miracle had been wrought through the agency of some evil power (comp. S. Luke xi. 15; S. John viii. 48). If the miracle *had been wrought* in the name of JESUS, the Apostles

could be brought under the operation of the law which condemned the working of signs by false prophets (Deut. xiii.) S. Peter boldly acknowledges that the miracle had indeed been worked in the name of JESUS of Nazareth ; but he goes on to show, out of their own Scriptures, that this JESUS of Nazareth is indeed the CHRIST, and that the very fact of His rejection proved Him to be the predicted Messiah ; the Stone which the builders rejected had become the head of the Corner (Ps. cxviii. 22, 23 ; S. Matt. xxi. 42 ; Isa. xxviii. 16 ; Eph. ii. 20-22 ; 1 Peter ii. 7). Neither is there salvation in any other. The cure of the lame man was but the sign of the power of salvation for the soul. High and low, priests and learned scribes, as well as the despised Galilean fishermen, must seek salvation through that Name alone, '*for there is none other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*' (v. 12).

3. Acquittal (v. 13-22).

Amazed and confounded by S. Peter's inspired words, so unlike what might have been expected from '*unlearned and ignorant men*,' the Council deliberated upon the best course to pursue. There was evidently a division of opinion among them. Some in the Sanhedrim remembered the words of Him who spake as never man spake (S. John vii. 46) ; they took knowledge of these ignorant Galileans, recognising them as having been the companions of JESUS. What if, after all, the work might be of God, and in opposing it they might be fighting against God (ch. v. 39) ?

The miracle itself was manifest to all who dwelt in Jerusalem ; none could deny it ; the man who had been healed was even then in court. It was impossible to bring any charge against the Apostles ; but in order that this doctrine should spread no further among the people, they would compel them to silence by threats.

Again the Apostles are called to the bar, and strictly forbidden by the spiritual rulers of Israel to speak or teach

in the Name of JESUS (v. 18). What is their reply? Full of courage and holy zeal, both alike express their determination to publish the glad tidings of the life, death, and resurrection of CHRIST. They will obey GOD rather than man; they will continue to exercise the commission entrusted to them—to be witnesses, at whatever cost, of those things they had seen and heard (v. 19, 20).

So when they had further threatened them they let them go, unable to find any ground for punishment, and afraid of exasperating the people who had witnessed the miracle, and who now glorified God for that which was done (v. 21).

4. *Prayer and its Answer* (v. 23-31).

Probably, as on a later occasion (ch. xii. 5), while the Apostles were in prison and before the Council, prayers were being offered without ceasing in the upper chamber for them.

Great must have been the joy of the disciples when the two Apostles returned. After hearing the account of all that had taken place in the Council, the whole assembly united together in prayer and praise, applying the words of Psalm ii. to the enemies of CHRIST—the *heathen*, or Roman soldiers; the *people*, the Jews; the '*kings of the earth*,' Herod and Pilate; the '*rulers*,' the Sanhedrim. All these were gathered together against the LORD and against His CHRIST; and yet their very malice and evil designs had been over-ruled by God for the carrying out of His will. Then, with one accord, they prayed for courage to preach the word with all boldness, and prayed that signs and wonders might continue to be done by the Name of the Holy Child JESUS.

An immediate token was given that their prayer was heard. As they rose from their knees, the place was shaken where they were assembled, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and, notwithstanding the threats of the Sanhedrim, they spake the Word of God with boldness, and bore witness with great power to the resurrection of CHRIST (v. 33).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. Obedience to God comes before obedience to man. When rulers, either spiritual or temporal, require anything that is contrary to the law of God, we are to hearken unto God, and obey His command at whatever cost.

2. To suffer persecution gladly for CHRIST's sake. To do what our conscience tells us is right, and to do all in our power to put down what is wrong, though we should be ridiculed and insulted for it.

3. To lay all our troubles before God, and ask Him for courage boldly to confess His Name.

LESSON VIII.

The Sin of Ananias and Sapphira.

Read Acts iv. 32-37 ; v. 1-11. *Learn* v. 3, 4 ; S. James i. 13-15.

1. *Unity and Love* (ch. iv. 32-35).

The closest bond of union knit together the first members of the Christian Church. The multitude of them that believed were of '*one heart and of one soul*'—a foretaste of the perfect love which shall one day be the life of the Church glorified. Their love towards one another made them look upon themselves as one family, with common needs, common joys, and common sufferings. Each felt that he held his possessions only as a trust for the general good, and those who possessed lands or houses sold them, laying the price at the Apostles' feet, that they might distribute to every man according to his need.

This sharing of property was a continuance of the life led by our Blessed LORD with the Twelve (S. John xii. 6 ; xiii. 29), and was a natural result of that fervent zeal and mutual love which made those early Christians realise that, as members of one body, they were bound to follow as literally as possible the example of the great Head of the Church. The first Christians, moreover, lived in daily expectation of CHRIST'S immediate return from heaven, and counted earthly things but dross compared with the everlasting inheritance which was so soon to be theirs. They had not yet learnt how long the coming of their LORD should be

delayed through man's unbelief, and the want of zeal displayed by His Church in carrying out her high commission to evangelise the world (2 Pet. iii. 8-10).

(There is much in the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, the earliest written epistles of S. Paul, to correct the erroneous idea that the second Advent would take place immediately.)

Community of goods was *voluntary*, not *compulsory*, in the early Church (ch. v. 4; xii. 12). The Apostles never attempted to introduce a social revolution. If what is called *communism* had been their principle, it would have destroyed the necessity of *almsgiving*—a duty strongly insisted on, both in the Acts and in the Epistles.)

2. *The Son of Consolation* (ch. iv. 36, 37).

Among those who sold their possessions, and laid them at the Apostles' feet, was Joses, surnamed Barnabas, or the '*Son of Consolation*,' a name probably given to him at his baptism. He is supposed to have been one of the Seventy, and his case was a peculiar one. He was not only a land-owner, one of the few rich men who joined the despised band of Nazarenes, but also a Levite, and as such entitled to receive tithes himself. His submission to the Apostles was a token that the Levitical priesthood was now ready to '*vanish away*' (Heb. viii. 13), and that the Apostles and their successors in the Christian Church were henceforth to be regarded as the true priests of the Israel of God.

S. Barnabas is frequently mentioned in the history of the early Church (ch. xi. 22-30; xii. 25; xiii., xiv., xv.; Gal. ii. 1-13).

Called to be an Apostle at the same time as S. Paul, he became his companion in his first missionary journey. He is especially distinguished by his complete self-renunciation, and his loving sympathy for others. Probably it was this tenderness for others which caused the temporary estrangement between himself and S. Paul (ch. xv. 36-40).

3. *An enemy hath done this* (ch. v. 1-4).

The great enemy of mankind, ever on the watch to sow tares among the wheat, was, we may be sure, filled with hatred and envy at the peace and happiness of the Infant Church. As with Adam and Eve in Paradise, so now in this second Paradise, he watches his opportunity to introduce discord and sin. The self-devotion of S. Barnabas no doubt caused him to be highly esteemed in the Christian community, and this desire of esteem became a snare to one who had received the grace of baptism and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but whose heart was not whole with God.

Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession ; came probably to the upper room, the Church's place of meeting for worship, and there, before the assembled brethren, laid what was supposed to be the full price of the land at the Apostles' feet, keeping back at the same time part of the sum he had received for it.

Perhaps the bystanders warmly applauded the seeming act of generosity, and for a moment Ananias may have thought he was successful in making the best of both worlds—in serving God and mammon.

But his triumph was short. Taught by the Holy Ghost to discern the thoughts of the heart, S. Peter fixes his searching eye on the wretched hypocrite, exclaiming, in tones which must have thrilled through his very soul, '*Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?*' (v. 3-4).

In this lay the enormity of his sin. He had thought to deceive *men* ; he was really trying to deceive *God*, for the Apostles were God's representatives on earth. It was also a sin of sacrilege, a taking from God that which he professed to have dedicated to Him.

4. *The Sin Punished* (v. 5-11).

Very awful was his punishment. Hardly had S. Peter ~~ceased~~ speaking, when Ananias fell down and gave up the

ghost, God thus punishing the sin of sacrilege as He punished the same sin in Achan (Josh. vii.), as a merciful warning to others, and to avoid the injury which the Church would have received had such a sin been allowed to go unpunished.

The sin of Ananias was no yielding to a sudden temptation. It had been deliberately planned and carried out, and his wife Sapphira was equally guilty. When, about three hours after, she entered the upper chamber, not knowing what was done, S. Peter gave her an opportunity of confessing her sin, and thus escaping her husband's doom. But while Ananias was guilty of an *acted* lie, Sapphira was guilty of a *spoken* lie, both equally hateful in the sight of a God of Truth. '*Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?*' And she said, '*Yea, for so much*' (v. 8). Then S. Peter inspired by the Holy Ghost, announces her coming doom—she, who had shared her husband's sin, must share her husband's punishment. No sooner were the words spoken than Sapphira fell dead at his feet, and the young men who had buried her husband, coming in at that moment and finding her dead, carried her forth to burial. No wonder that '*great fear came upon all the Church and upon as many as heard these things*' (v. 11)—a wholesome fear, which should keep others from a like offence, and stamp deep into the hearts of all, the awful sin of hypocrisy, and the danger of seeking the praise of men rather than the praise of God.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. The true disciple of CHRIST will try to imitate S. Barnabas by whole-heartedness in God's service, complete self-surrender, and unselfishness and loving sympathy towards others.

2. S. Peter's question, '*Why hath Satan filled thine heart?*' &c. (v. 3), plainly teaches that Ananias might have resisted and overcome the temptation, had he chosen to do so. We cannot help Satan suggesting evil, but we can refuse to listen to the evil. We can overcome the enemy by prayer

and watchfulness; evil thoughts must be put away at once, as quickly as we should shake off a spark of fire.

3. Lying lips, we are told, are an abomination to God. All forms of falsehood come from Satan, the father of lies (S. John viii. 44), and are therefore especially hateful in the sight of God (Rev. xxii. 15). Whether we *say* or *do* anything with the intention of deceiving others, it is equally sinful; we should always be careful to act uprightly, and to speak the truth under all circumstances, seeking only the praise of God and not the good opinion of men.

(In vv. 3 and 4 we have a direct proof of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Ananias had '*lied to the Holy Ghost,*' and in doing so '*had not lied unto men, but unto God.*')

LESSON IX.

The Prison Doors Opened.

Read Acts v. 12-42. Learn Ps. xxxiv. 7 ; 1 Peter ii. 20, 21.

1. *Miracles of Healing* (v. 12-16).

The punishment of Ananias and Sapphira acted as a solemn warning to all who might otherwise have joined the Church from unworthy motives. But it did not hinder the growth of the Church. Multitudes both of men and women crowded round S. Peter and the rest of the Apostles, as, notwithstanding the orders of the Council (ch. iv. 18, 21), they daily preached the religion of JESUS in Solomon's Porch, the place of general resort for all who came to worship in the Temple ; and day by day numbers were gathered into the Church or '*added to the LORD*' by holy baptism.

Many and startling were the signs and wonders wrought by the Apostles. As they passed to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, the sick were brought out and laid on beds and couches, while multitudes from the cities and villages around brought not only their sick, but also those who were vexed with unclean spirits, and they were healed every one. Sometimes this healing power was exercised through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles, as had been the case with their Master (v. 12 ; S. Mark vi. 5), and in fulfilment of His promise (S. Mark xvi. 18). Sometimes, stranger still, the very shadow of S. Peter was made a sacrament of healing (v. 15). We may be sure that S. Peter and the other Apostles were careful to ascribe the glory of these

miracles to CHRIST, and not to themselves (ch. iii. 12, 13, 16). They looked upon themselves as the *channels*, not the *sources*, of Divine power.

CHRIST when on earth had shed forth Divine virtue on those who touched with faith the hem of His garment (S. Matt. ix. 20 ; xiv. 36 ; S. Mark vi. 56 ; S. Luke viii. 44). And now that He is glorified in heaven, He works by the shadow of S. Peter, and later on by handkerchiefs taken from the person of S. Paul (ch. xix. 12), thus fulfilling His own prophecy, that they who should believe in Him when glorified, should do greater works than He had done on earth (S. John xiv. 12) ; and teaching us that those who now touch Him by faith through His Word and Sacraments, receive Divine healing and strength.

(‘ We need find no stumbling-block in the fact of Peter’s *shadow* having been the medium of working miracles. Cannot the Creator Spirit work with any instruments, or with none as pleases Him ? And what is a hand, or a voice, more than a shadow, except that the analogy of the ordinary instrument is a greater help to faith in the recipient ? Where faith, as apparently here, did not need this help, the less likely medium was adopted.’—*Alford*).

2. Arrest of the Twelve (v. 17-21).

The Sadducees and rulers were filled with anger and jealousy as they marked the rapid spread of the new religion, and the readiness of the people to believe in the crucified JESUS as their risen Saviour.

Suddenly, in the midst of preaching and healing, the Twelve are arrested by order of the rulers, and thrown into the common prison.

How foolish and blind the Sadducees must have been to think that they could fight against God (Rom. viii. 31). In the dark night, that gloomy prison is filled with heavenly light, and a glorious angel flings open the prison doors, and bids *the Twelve stand once more in the Temple, and preach*

to the people the word of life. The Apostles lose no time in obeying the command. At daybreak, without a thought or care for their own safety, they return to the Temple, and recommence their teaching.

3. *The Sanhedrim* (v. 21-28).

The morning came, the Council assembled ; officers were despatched to fetch the prisoners, but they returned with a strange report. The prison doors were securely fastened, the keepers on guard outside, but when the doors were opened the prison was found to be empty.

Astonished and perplexed as to what course to pursue, the High Priest turns to the captain of the guard and the chief priests, to know what should be their next step, when news is brought that the escaped prisoners, far from seeking a place of concealment, are even at that very moment standing in the Temple, and teaching the people.

Enraged at their audacity, and yet afraid of the people, the captain and officers go at once to the Temple, arrest the Twelve a second time, without violence, and lead them to the bar of the Sanhedrim.

No angel is sent from heaven this time to deliver the Apostles, but One greater than any angel, even the LORD Himself, we may be sure stood by them and strengthened them (2 Tim. iv. 17). Filled with hatred and disappointed malice, the High Priest charges them with disobedience to the command of the Council in filling Jerusalem with their doctrine, and intending to bring upon them the Blood of this Man.

Perhaps as the High Priest uttered these words, he called to remembrance that One whose name he dared not utter, and who, standing on that very spot where His followers now stood, had solemnly proclaimed Himself to be the Messiah, and foretold His second coming to judge the world (S. Matt. xxvi. 63, 64). If so, he must have trembled at the bold reply of the Apostles. Undaunted and undismayed, standing in the midst of their enemies, they proclaim

the great truth which in every age should be the watchword of the Church—'*We ought to obey God rather than men*' (v. 29).

The Church, as a divinely-constituted Society, a kingdom not of this world, must be governed by her own laws and ordinances, and must never—for the sake of so-called expediency, or for any other reason—allow earthly rulers to interfere with her liberty, and fetter her freedom, with laws and restrictions contrary to the Divine will.

4. *The Counsel of Gamaliel* (v. 29–42).

That Name which the High Priest dared not utter, is again proclaimed before the Sanhedrim. Again the guilt of the Crucifixion is brought home to them, and they are told that the crucified Jesus is indeed exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins (v. 30–32).

The judges were '*cut to the heart*' as they listened to these bold words. In their rage and fury, they retired to take counsel how they might slay these men whom they could not silence.

But there was one in the Council of a different mind. Gamaliel, a Pharisee and famous doctor of the law—perhaps a friend of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, yet without sufficient courage to give up earthly distinction and throw in his lot with the despised Nazarenes—spoke in defence of the Apostles, urging that if the work was of men it would come to nothing, as had already been the case with Theudas and Judas of Galilee, two leaders of revolt against the Roman power, who had both claimed to be the Messiah; but that if this work was of God, if these miracles, which none could deny, were wrought by His power, and not by the agency of the Evil One, then indeed they would not be able to overthrow it, and might even be found to be fighting against God. The words of this celebrated teacher produced *a marked effect* on the Council; and instead of sentence of *death being passed* upon the Apostles, they were scourged and

then released, with renewed threats, and commands not to speak in the Name of JESUS. So they departed from the presence of the Council, *rejoicing*, not in their freedom, but because they had been '*counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name*' (v. 41). '*And daily in the Temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach JESUS CHRIST*' (v. 42).

(The miraculous release of the Apostles, and their arrest and scourging on the following day without any miraculous interference, was probably designed to increase their faith and courage, and at the same time to teach their persecutors that they could have no power over them except it were given them from above (S. John xix. 11). When the Apostles had to endure the scourging they knew that it was through no failure of God to help them, and they rejoiced in being counted worthy to drink of the Master's cup, and share His baptism of suffering. It was to teach the same great truth that our LORD, before yielding Himself to His enemies, struck them to the ground by the utterance of the words '*I am He*'—S. John xviii. 4-6).

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Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. God never allows us to be tried or tempted beyond our strength. Whatever our difficulties may be, He can and will deliver us, or else give us grace to bear persecution and suffering.

2. The Apostles rejoiced that they were privileged to suffer shame for JESUS' sake. If we are faithful followers of CHRIST, we shall look upon it as a privilege to take up our cross and follow Him, and learn to bear ridicule, or even unkindness and ill treatment, patiently and gladly for His sake.

3. God's holy angels are always near us, to guard and shield us from harm, ever ascending and descending between heaven and earth, engaged in ministries of love.

4. The reasoning of Gamaliel was not good. *Success* is no safe test of truth. Our LORD's life on earth was a *failure* in the eyes of the world. We walk by faith, not by sight ; we must believe and obey GOD now, and hereafter we shall receive the reward of faithful service (S. Matt. xxv. 21).

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LESSON X.

The Order of Deacons.

Read Acts vi. 1-7. Learn S. John x. 1 ; Heb. v. 4.

1. Murmuring and Discontent (v. 1-4).

The Christian Faith had now been fully taught and proclaimed in Jerusalem. The number of the disciples daily increased (v. 1), but this very increase led to a serious difficulty. Complaints arose from the 'Grecians' (foreign Jews who spoke Greek, and also Gentile proselytes who had been admitted by circumcision into the Jewish covenant), that their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of alms and food provided by the wealthier Christians for their poorer brethren.

Hitherto this distribution had rested with the Apostles themselves, and had they not been inspired by the Holy Ghost they might have taken offence at the implied blame, and have seen no reason for making any change for the sake of pleasing a few discontented converts from foreign lands, who had lately been admitted into the Church.

But the Apostles did not reason in this way. They turned what might have been a serious evil into an occasion of good. Had not their Master told them that His Church was to go on growing and expanding like the branches of the mustard-tree (S. Matt. xiii. 31, 32)? And if so, its organisation would also need a corresponding expansion and growth. The ministry of the Church must be widened, and an order formed to meet this need. The

Apostles recognised in this, as in every other circumstance, the guiding hand of their unseen LORD. They called together a general meeting of the Christians in Jerusalem, and laid before them the remedy they proposed.

It was not meet, they explained, that they, the Apostles, should forsake those higher functions to which they had been specially appointed—the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the Sacraments—and spend their whole time in lesser duties which could be performed by others (v. 2).

Now that the Church had grown to such large proportions, there was need of a further division of labour among her ministers, and therefore the assembled brethren were bidden to choose from among themselves ‘*seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,*’ and bring them to the Apostles, that they might be solemnly ordained by them for this work.

2. *The Ordination of the Seven* (v. 5-7).

The Apostles’ words pleased the whole multitude. Seven men were chosen by them, men of honest report whom all could readily trust, full of the Holy Ghost, and also ‘*full of wisdom,*’ knowing how to deal with every case. The names of the Seven (v. 6) are all Greek. One of them, Nicolas, was a proselyte, or Gentile convert, and the fact that he was elected to the office shews the desire of the Church to put an end to all occasion of murmuring, by choosing those who would be acceptable to the aggrieved party. But though the choice of the Seven had been left to the multitude, their consecration must be reserved for the Apostles (v. 6).

By the laying on of *their* hands alone could they receive power to exercise those sacred functions to which they had been called. For the work of the Deacons was to consist not merely in the distribution of alms, but also in baptizing, and preaching the Word of GOD (vv. 8, 9 ; ch. viii. 5-7; 36-38).

The Christian ministry is derived from our Blessed LORD Himself, the Fountain of all ministerial authority. He gave an earnest of a permanent ministry, deriving its authority and power from Him, when He ordained the Twelve Apostles and the Seventy Evangelists during the time of His personal ministry, and He established the Twelve as the channels through which ministerial life was to flow, when, on the day of His resurrection, He breathed on them the gift of the Holy Ghost, and gave them their high commission (S. John xx. 22, 23).

When, by reason of the rapid growth of the Church, the Apostles found themselves too few to fulfil all its ministerial duties, they, by the exercise of the authority given to them by CHRIST, delegated part of this ministry to seven others, whom we afterwards read of as Deacons (Phil. i. 1; 1 Tim. iii. 8). Later on, as the sphere of the Church's work was still further extended, it became necessary to appoint permanent and stationary ministers in the local churches which the Apostles organised. These were called '*presbyters*,' or '*elders*' (Acts xi. 30; xiv. 23; xv. 2, 4, 6, 22, 23, *presbyter* is Greek for priest); and over these again others were ordained, who were called '*Overseers*' (Acts xx. 18), or bishops (1 Tim. iii. 1; v. 1, 22; Tit. i. 7).

Thus, ever since the time of the Apostles, there have been three orders of ministry appointed by God in the Church—Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Each order has its own appointed work. That of a Deacon is to preach, and baptize, and to assist the Priest; that of a Priest is to bless in God's name, to pronounce absolution, to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and to guide and teach the flock committed to his charge; a Bishop receives the further powers of confirming and ordaining, and exercises the office of ruler and overseer in the Church of CHRIST (Acts xx. 28; Heb. xiii. 17).

The name *Deacon* does not appear in the Acts. From Phil. i. 1, and 1 Tim. iii. 8-13, we find the order established, and its special functions fully recognised in Apostolic time

This passage has always been regarded as giving the date of its institution, and is therefore appointed as the Epistle for the *ordering of Deacons*. It is also a very ancient custom that the Deacon should administer the chalice in Holy Communion; and S. Paul's words with respect to the Deacons '*holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*' (1 Tim. iii. 9), are supposed by many to refer to this custom.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. The powers of the ministry, with the necessary grace to exercise them rightly, can only be conferred through holy orders, or ordination, which our Blessed LORD himself instituted for this purpose. We are specially warned that no man may take this honour to himself, but he that is called of God (Heb. v. 1-4). Those who presume to exercise any office or ministry in the Church of God, without being duly ordained and commissioned to do so, commit a grievous sin. Our Lord warns us against them as '*thieves and robbers who enter not by the door into the sheepfold, but climb up some other way*' (S. John x. 1)—*false prophets*' (S. Matt. vii. 15)—'*blind leaders of the blind*' (S. Matt. xv. 14). We are warned there will be many such before the end comes (Acts xx. 29, 30; Rom. x. 15; 2 Pet. ii. 1).

2. Not to be angry at implied blame, but to try by the exercise of patience and meekness to remove all cause of discontent.

3. Every Christian is bound to do something, however humble, for CHRIST. As in our natural body each member has its own appointed work, so it is in the Church, which is the mystical Body of CHRIST. Even children may do something, and by kind and gentle words, by a fearless refusal to join their companions in sin, by unselfishness and love towards others, involving self-denial and self-sacrifice, may faithfully carry out the work entrusted to them.

LESSON XI

The Trial of S. Stephen.

Read Acts vi. 8-15; vii. 51-54. Learn S. Matt. x. 28, 32, 33.

1. S. Stephen's Power (ch. vi. 8-10).

The appointment of the Deacons was followed by a great increase in the number of believers; not only the common people, but also a great company of the priests, those who were most deeply imbued with national prejudices, and therefore harder than others to convince, became obedient to the faith (v. 7).

Of two only out of the seven have we any special record—S. Stephen and S. Philip.

Of S. Stephen we are told that he was '*full of faith and of the Holy Ghost*'; that great wonders and miracles were wrought by him among the people, and that none of his enemies were able to '*withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake*' (vv. 5, 8, 10).

He appears to have laboured chiefly among the foreign Jews at Jerusalem; the three synagogues that opposed him most bitterly all belonged to Grecian Jews; the Libertines or Freedmen—probably Jews who had been carried captive to Rome, and had there gained their freedom—a synagogue of African Jews, and another from Cilicia and Asia.

The young Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, belonged to that Cilician synagogue, and was also a member of the Sanhedrim (ch. xxii. 20). Brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, the most learned and celebrated teacher of his day, and burning with

zeal for the Law, he was probably among those who daily disputed with Stephen. It is probable that some great festival—perhaps that of the Passover—was being celebrated; this would account for the presence of so many foreign Jews in Jerusalem, and also for their excited zeal for the Law, and their hatred of the new faith that was to supplant it.

2. *S. Stephen's Arrest* (ch. vi. 11-15).

As it had been with the Master, so now it was with His faithful servant. If his enemies could not silence him, they would compass his death. So they had recourse to slander and false witness. S. Stephen was arrested on a charge of speaking '*blasphemous words against Moses and against God*' (v. 11). '*He ceaseth not,*' they said, '*to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this JESUS of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us*' (v. 14).

Such was the charge laid before the Sanhedrim. The seventy judges, having heard the accusation, looked at the prisoner standing before the bar, waiting to hear what he would say in his defence. To their surprise, they beheld the face of the young deacon transfigured with heavenly glory, like the '*face of an angel*'—the outward visible sign of the glory of that Holy Spirit who was filling and strengthening his heart.

3. *S. Stephen's Defence* (part of ch. vii. 1-53).

Called upon by the High Priest to answer the charge brought against him, S. Stephen reviews the whole of the past history of the chosen race, pointing out to his hearers that the presence and grace of God was not limited to one country, and that the God of glory first appeared to Abraham not in Judea, but in Mesopotamia (v. 2). Afterwards, when the children of Israel were strangers in Egypt, God was with *them* there; He blessed them, so that they multiplied *exceedingly*, and sent them a deliverer in Moses, who was

trained first in Pharaoh's court, and then in the land of Midian. Here GOD revealed Himself to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai (v. 17-34). Even when the Temple was built, GOD had said that the '*Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands*'; for that Heaven was His throne and earth His footstool, and He was the Creator and Preserver, not of one race alone, but of all men (v. 47-50).

S. Stephen concludes his defence with a solemn rebuke '*Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears,*' he exclaims, '*ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye*' (vv. 51-53). Your fathers sold their brother into Egypt (v. 9); they rejected GOD's messengers (vv. 27, 39); they slew those who '*shewed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers*' (v. 52).

From S. Stephen's defence we learn that the enmity of the Jews had been stirred by the preaching of the doctrine that GOD was not the GOD of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles, and that His worship was no longer to be restricted to any particular place or nation. The time had arrived when the Gospel was to spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea, into '*Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth*'; and, from the charges laid against S. Stephen, it is evident that the world-wide aspect of the Messiah's kingdom had been dwelt upon by the Christian teachers.

Up to this time the Pharisees had been less hostile than the Sadducees towards the sect of the Nazarenes; but now that this hated doctrine was taught, all their forbearance was at an end, and one and all in the Council were bent on his destruction.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. To pray continually for the grace of GOD's Holy Spirit, to enable us rightly to fulfil whatever work GOD has appointed for us, that, like S. Stephen, we may be '*full of faith and power,*' and triumph over all our enemies.

2. To be bold and fearless in rebuking sin, and yet full of charity for those who commit the sin.

3. To be brave and patient in the midst of opposition, slander, and persecution.

NOTE.—There are several difficulties in S. Stephen's speech, owing to apparent discrepancies between its statements and those of Genesis. But a prayerful and patient study of Holy Scripture will explain these, and similar statements, which at first sight may seem perplexing.

Of these difficulties, the most important occurs in ch. vii. 16, which seems at first to be at variance with Josh. xxiv. 32, and to make a confusion between Abraham and Jacob, Machpelah and Shechem. But we are nowhere told that Abraham did *not* purchase a plot of ground at Shechem. Shechem was the first place in Canaan where God appeared to Abraham, and where he erected his first altar (Gen. xii. 6, 7). Abraham was not the man to occupy land that belonged to others (Gen. xxiii. 9, 13, 16); he would, therefore, probably purchase the site of the altar, if only to preserve so sacred a spot from desecration by the heathen.

The other seeming discrepancies are easily reconciled by prayerful and patient study. S. Stephen could not be mistaken, for he was full of the Holy Ghost (ch. vi. 5), and Christ had promised His disciples that when they were brought before Councils the Holy Ghost would speak by their mouths (S. Matt. x. 19, 20; S. Mark xiii. 11; S. Luke xii. 11, 12; xxi. 15). God reveals His mysteries to the meek and lowly (Ps. xxv. 8; S. Matt. xi. 25, 26).

The difficulties of Holy Scripture are intended to exercise our faith; if we treat them as we ought to do, the time will come when the mists and clouds shall pass away, and we shall gain a clearer spiritual vision, till, like S. Stephen, we too may see the heavens opened, and contemplate the glory of our ascended Saviour.

LESSON XII.

The First Martyr.

Read Acts vii. 54-60. Learn vv. 55, 56 ; S. John xii. 26 ; Rev. ii. 10.

1. *The Vision* (vv. 54-56).

The accused had become the accuser. S. Stephen had affirmed that, in rejecting and crucifying JESUS of Nazareth, they, his judges, had actually become the betrayers and murderers of the Messiah. A violent uproar immediately takes place. Those seventy great and learned men, who compose the great Council of the Sanhedrim, gnash their teeth with rage as they hear his stern words of rebuke.

But One whom those violent and angry judges see not, stands at His servant's right hand to defend him (Ps. cix. 31).

A hush falls on the assembly, as S. Stephen, his face glowing with heavenly radiance, turns from the scowling looks of scorn and hatred bent on him, and looking up steadfastly into Heaven, sees '*the glory of God, and JESUS standing on the right hand of God,*' ready to protect and reward His faithful servant.

'Behold,' he exclaims, '*I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God*' (v. 55) ; that very Son of Man who not long before had stood on that same spot, condemned unjustly, and shamefully treated by those very judges, and whom they should one day see coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory (S. Matt. xxvi. 64).

2. *The Crown* (vv. 57-60).

Perhaps the memory of those words increased the rage

and fury of the Council. There was a loud cry of horror ; then they stopped their ears and ran upon him with one accord, and dragged him outside the city gate, and stoned him, probably on the very spot where his LORD was crucified.

In order to hurl the stones more easily, the witnesses (Deut. xvii. 7) lay aside their loose outer garments, giving them in charge to Saul of Tarsus, one of the youngest members of the Sanhedrim, who stands by '*consenting unto his death*' (ch. xxii. 20). Little do they realise that, in hurling those stones, they are but fashioning the Martyr's crown.

As the terrible blows succeed one another, S. Stephen's voice is again heard, as with unfaltering faith he prays, '*LORD JESUS, receive my spirit*'—then, meekly kneeling, like his Master, he intercedes for his murderers, '*LORD, lay not this sin to their charge.*' '*And when he had said this he fell asleep*' (v. 60).

The excited crowd disperse, and loving hands lay to rest in silence and sorrow the body of the first martyr, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life (1 Cor. xv. 51-57). But that poor torn and mangled body is, after all, only the outer shell, or case. The Saint and Martyr has been received into the joy of his LORD, to be for ever with Him on whom his gaze has been fixed all through his dying agony, and who said, '*Where I am, there shall also My servant be*' (S. John xii. 26).

Oh, blessed privilege ! to be the first member of the Christian Church in heaven—the first to behold the Son of Man on His Throne of Glory.

S. Stephen's instant recognition of Him whom he saw through the open heavens, so unlike the '*Who art Thou, Lord?*' of Saul of Tarsus (ch. ix. 5), together with the prayer for his murderers, the faithful echo of the first word from the Cross, point him out unmistakably as one of those who had served and followed CHRIST on earth.

What impression did the dying looks and words of S. Stephen make upon Saul of Tarsus as he returned home after the execution was over ? Perhaps the words of the

Martyr had made a deeper impression than he was conscious of at the time. Probably it is to him that we owe the preservation of S. Stephen's great speech ; and his own discourse at Antioch (ch. xiii.) bears a striking resemblance to the defence of the first Martyr.

(Many commentators have represented the execution of S. Stephen as a tumultuary outbreak in defiance of Roman law. But many passages of Holy Scripture seem to imply that the Sanhedrim had the power of inflicting death (S. John v. 18 ; vii. 32, 51 ; viii. 5, 7, 59 ; xi. 53 ; xii. 10 ; Acts xxiv. 6 ; xxvi. 10). The reply of the Jews to Pilate (S. John xviii. 31), on which the opposite view is based, simply means, according to S. Augustine and S. Chrysostom, that it was not lawful for the Jews to put any one to death during the Feast of the Passover.)

3. *The Master's Footsteps.*

The incidents of the Trial and Death of S. Stephen bear a striking resemblance to those of the great King of Martyrs. He was disliked and attacked, probably on account of his miracles and growing popularity (Comp. Acts vi. 8-10 with S. Matt. xii. 22-24 ; xxi. 14, 23 ; S. John xi. 47 ; xii. 37). When his enemies were foiled in argument, false witnesses were hired to accuse him of blasphemy (Comp. Acts vi. 10-14 with S. Matt. xxii. 15, 46 ; xxvi. 59, 65). He was unjustly condemned and shamefully treated by his judges (Comp. Acts vii. 54, 57 with S. Matt. xxvi. 66-68).

Like his Master, S. Stephen's farewell words were those of faithful rebuke (Comp. Acts vii. 51-53 with S. Matt. xxiii.). Like Him he commended his spirit to the Lord, and

Like Him with pardon on his tongue,
In midst of mortal pain,
He prayed for them that did the wrong—
Who follows in his train ?

(Comp. Acts vii. 60 with S. Luke xxiii. 46, 32).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. To try to go through our daily life with the vision of **JESUS** in **His** glory ever before us ; watching over us, strengthening us against temptation, helping us in trouble, showing us the glory that awaits us if we are faithful unto death.

2. **S. Stephen** was '*full of the Holy Ghost.*' It is only in the power of the Holy Ghost that we can see this vision. We must therefore be obedient to His inspirations, and continually seek His help.

3. **S. Stephen** looked away from his tormentors, he '*looked up steadfastly into Heaven,*' and we too must do our part, turning away from earthly cares, pleasures, and sins, and setting our affections steadfastly on heavenly things.

4. To bear suffering and trial with courage and patience, remembering that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us, and that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (Rom. viii. 18 ; 2 Cor. iv. 17).

5. Like **S. Stephen**, we must pray for, and forgive all who injure us.

Grant, O Lord, that in all our sufferings here on earth, we may steadfastly look up to Heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed, after the example of Thy first martyr, **S. Stephen**, praying to Thee, O Blessed **JESUS**, who standest at the right hand of God, to succour all those that suffer for Thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

LESSON XIII.

Sowing the Seed.

Read Acts viii. 1-8. *Learn* Ps. cxvi. 15 ; cxxvi. 5, 6 ; Is. lix. 19.

1. *The Burial of S. Stephen* (v. 2).

How the Christian community must have grieved over the loss of S. Stephen, for he was one of their best and greatest teachers, but they little guessed what abundant fruit his glorious martyrdom would gain for the Church.

God's ways are not as our ways. His work is not hindered when those who seem most needed are suddenly called away, to engage in yet higher, holier ministries within the veil. Devout men carry the crushed body of the martyr to the grave with loving reverence, and make great lamentation over him, an act of Christian courage which must have exposed them to much danger, for it was not lawful among the Jews to make outward demonstrations of grief for persons condemned by the Sanhedrim.

2. *Persecution* (vv. 1, 3, 4).

Very bitter was the persecution which now broke out against the Christians, so that in obedience to their Master's command, '*when they persecute you in this city flee ye into another*' (S. Matt. x. 23), the Christians at Jerusalem were scattered abroad throughout Judea and Samaria ; except the Apostles, who had probably received a special charge to remain at Jerusalem.

Foremost among the persecutors was Saul of Tarsus, who, in his zeal for the Law, had scoffed at S. Stephen's speech

and taken an active part in his murder. The name of the cruel young Pharisee was known and feared, far and wide, in every Christian household (ch. ix. 13). And no wonder ! for '*he made havoc of the Church*' (v. 3), and, backed by the authority of the Sanhedrim, broke into many a Christian household, and, dragging forth men and women, had them bound and cast into prison, or compelled them to enter the synagogues, and there tried to force them to blaspheme or curse the name of Christ. When they refused to deny their LORD, he became '*exceedingly mad against them, persecuting them even unto strange cities,*' giving his vote against them when tried for their life (ch. ix. 2; xxii. 4, 19; xxvi. 10, 11), and all this, he tells us, because, '*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of JESUS of Nazareth*' (ch. xxvi. 9).

How vividly these sins were remembered, even to his dying day, we find in his Epistle to S. Timothy, where Paul the aged Saint confesses that he was once '*a blasphemer, and a persecutor,*' but that he had obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief, and that in him JESUS CHRIST might shew forth all long-suffering, to the end that none might despair of obtaining that grace which had been so freely accorded to himself, the chief of sinners (1 Tim i. 13-16). Oh, wonderful constraining power of the grace of God, which could turn Saul the Persecutor, into Paul the Apostle, in answer to the dying Martyr's prayer !

3. *The seed sown* (vv. 5-8).

It has been said '*the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.*' Never does the Church so thrive, never do her purity, faith, and love shine so brightly as in scenes of persecution. It is in prosperity, not adversity, that her love waxes cold, and indifference, unbelief and corruption undermine her faith.

The Churches of Sardis and Laodicea appear to have *been free* from the persecutions and trials which beset the *other five Churches*, and to all appearance were rich and

prosperous ; while to the great head of the Church Sardis was *all but dead*, and Laodicea was '*wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*' (Rev. iii. 1, 17).

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His Saints. The blood of the Martyr Stephen, with that of those who, animated by a like constancy and courage, joyfully laid down their lives rather than deny their LORD, cried aloud to God, and drew down showers of blessings upon the infant Church.

The names of those who, during this persecution, '*were slain for the word of GOD, and for the testimony which they held*' (Rev. vi. 9), though unrecorded in the Church's calendar, are registered in GOD's eternal book of remembrance, and their reward is with the Most High.

Into all countries whither they were driven, the scattered disciples carried the precious seed, which sown in tears (Ps. cxxvi. 6) was soon to bring forth an abundant harvest.

Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven Deacons, and therefore in special danger at Jerusalem, was sent to Samaria, and there, perhaps at Sychar, where Christ had sat weary on the well, and had foretold the gathering in of the spiritual harvest among that despised nation (S. John iv. 35) '*he preached CHRIST unto them*'; told them that He who once had tarried two days in their midst was now exalted at the right hand of God, ready to forgive their sins, and to pour forth upon them also the gifts of His holy spirit.

With one accord the people listened to his preaching, and when they saw the wonderful miracles he wrought (v. 7), as signs that his message was indeed from God, they accepted the tidings with '*great joy*,' and multitudes of Gentile converts were admitted by Holy Baptism into the fold of CHRIST.

(The expression '*preaching the word*' (v. 4) does not mean the Old Testament Scriptures, but the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh, the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of CHRIST.)

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. Reverence towards the bodies of the dead, and also for churchyards and cemeteries, the resting-places of those bodies which were once temples of the Holy Ghost, and have been committed to the keeping of the grave, in order to rise again in glory, and be made like unto CHRIST's glorious body (Phil. iii. 21).

2. '*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*'

All Christians are called to be sowers of the seed, to tell the story of the love of JESUS to those who are ignorant of it, and try to win souls for Him.

3. Never to be disheartened at seeming hindrances to the Church's work. Her victories have ever been wrought in apparent weakness and failure; all things, however seemingly adverse, are in reality working together for her final triumph.

4. '*There was great joy in that city*' (v. 8). Spiritual joy is one of the chief fruits of the Spirit. There is no joy so deep and real as that which springs from a sense of forgiven sin, peace with God, and power over our own passions.

The Christian soul by patience grows
More perfect day by day;
And brighter still, and brighter glows
With Heaven's eternal ray.

LESSON XIV.

The Laying-on of Hands.

Read Acts viii. 9-25. Learn Eph. iv. 30; Heb. vi. 1, 2.

1. *S. Philip and the Sorcerer* (v. 9-13).

The Samaritans, like the Jews, were at this time expecting the Advent of the Messiah (S. John iv. 25); and before the arrival of S. Philip, an impostor named Simon, taking advantage of this general expectation, had, by the exercise of certain magical arts, persuaded the Samaritans, '*from the least to the greatest,*' to receive him as '*some great one,*' so that he had come to be looked upon as '*the great power of God*' (v. 10)—that is, one of a higher order than the angels. But the far greater miracles which they now saw S. Philip performing—evil spirits cast out—the palsied cured—the lame healed (v. 7)—drew the multitude away from Simon, and caused them to listen to the message of salvation preached by S. Philip.

Not their bodies only, but their souls also were healed; they believed and were baptized, both men and women (v. 12).

Among that multitude of earnest believers, so eagerly seeking Holy Baptism, came Simon the sorcerer, to all appearance as sincere as the rest, but in reality envying the superior power of S. Philip, and hoping, by the profession of Christianity, to regain his lost influence.

2. *The Gift of the Holy Ghost* (v. 14-25).

Glad tidings indeed were those that reached the Church at Jerusalem that '*Samaria had received the Word of God*' (v. 14).

No time must be lost in imparting to these newly-baptized Gentile converts the gifts of the Holy Ghost. S. Philip the Deacon could preach and baptize, but to the Apostles only, as the first bishops of the Church, had been committed the power of imparting the gifts of the Holy Ghost through the laying-on of hands.

At the risk of their lives in this time of fiery persecution, S. Peter and S. John undertake the long and perilous journey from Jerusalem to Samaria. The multitude of believers are called together; the Apostles make it manifest to all by their prayer that the gift is from God, and that they are but His ordained instruments and channels of His grace. Then, one by one, each convert kneels, and receives the gift of the Holy Ghost through the laying-on of the Apostles' hands (v. 17).

Doubtless this descent of the Holy Ghost was accompanied by some outward visible manifestation; for when Simon the sorcerer saw that '*through laying-on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given*' (v. 18), he dared to offer money that he might have the same power. Well might Simon tremble at the indignant reply of S. Peter, '*Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money*' (v. 20).

He had desired the holiest gifts of God from unholy motives, and he had in consequence drawn upon himself a curse instead of a blessing. His '*heart was not right in the sight of God*'; he was in the '*gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*'; the slave, the prisoner of Satan, tied and bound with the chain of his sins.

Yet even for such an offender there is hope if only he will repent, and pray God if perhaps the thought of his *heart, the covetous desire which had led to the commission of so great a sin, might be forgiven* (v. 20-24).

There is not much ground to hope, from Simon's answer to S. Peter's burning words, that his repentance was sincere. He utters no word of sorrow for his evil thought, but entreats the Apostle to pray for him—not in order that the sin might be put away, but only, like Pharaoh of old, that he may not suffer the punishment of that sin (Ex. viii. 8, 28; ix. 28; x. 17)—a petition prompted by fear and followed by no change of conduct.

How long the Apostles remained in the towns of Samaria we are not told. They had been sent forth by the Church to confirm those who had been baptized, and, this done, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel in such villages of Samaria as lay in their road; perhaps, among others, to that very village upon which S. John had once desired to call down fire from heaven (S. Luke ix. 54), but which, through his preaching, may now have received the Holy Ghost, the true Fire from heaven (S. Luke xii. 49).

3. Confirmation.

Confirmation, or the *Laying-on of Hands*, was probably instituted by our LORD during the forty days between His Resurrection and His Ascension. From the earliest ages of the Christian Church, and in every part of it all over the world, Confirmation has been considered essential to the full perfection of Christian life, completing the life of grace begun in Baptism, by giving a fresh outpouring of the Holy Ghost, to strengthen our faith, to enable us to fulfil perfectly the duties of a Christian life, and to overcome the temptations that surround us.

S. Paul calls Confirmation (or the laying-on of hands) one of the '*first principles*' (part of the foundation) of the '*doctrine of CHRIST*' (Heb. vi. 1, 2). The journey of S. Peter and S. John to Samaria for the express purpose of administering this ordinance, and S. Paul's first question to the Ephesian converts, '*Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?*' (Acts xix. 1-6) show us how important the Apostles considered Confirmation to be.

Confirmation is sometimes called in the Epistles the Seal of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. i. 21, 22; Eph. i. 13, 14; iv. 30), and also the Unction and Anointing of the Holy One (1 John ii. 20, 27). The outward sign in Confirmation is the laying-on of the Bishop's hands on the heads of those who are to be confirmed, while he prays for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them (see Order of Confirmation). We learn from Holy Scripture that the '*laying-on of hands*' has always been connected in a very special way with the bestowing of spiritual gifts and blessings (Gen. xlviii. 8-20; Deut. xxxiv. 9; S. Mark x. 16; 2 Tim. i. 6). The inward grace bestowed upon us in Confirmation is that of spiritual growth and strength—the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Ghost: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Knowledge, Fortitude, Godliness, and Holy Fear.

These seven precious Gifts are called the *ordinary* gifts of the Holy Ghost, to distinguish them from what are called His *extraordinary* gifts—such as the power of working miracles, and speaking in different languages. These were given for a special purpose; they were signs, bearing witness to the truth of the doctrines taught (Acts v. 12; 1 Cor. xiv. 22; Heb. ii. 4). They did not impart any spiritual profit to those who exercised them (1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2), and are no longer needed in these days.

What we *do* need is heavenly light and inward strength, to enable us to know and carry out the will of God, and to work out our own salvation; and these graces are given in proportion to the fervent desire and purity of heart with which we prepare to receive Confirmation.

By the gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel and Knowledge, the Holy Ghost enlightens our *understanding*, which through the Fall has become dark and ignorant, unable to understand Divine Truth. The gift of Fortitude strengthens our weak and perverse *will*, which, owing to the same cause, inclines to evil instead of good. The gifts of *Godliness* and Holy Fear remedy our corrupt *affections*, *drawing us from the love of earthly things to the love of God.*

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. Seek to cultivate these seven gifts in order to grow in the spiritual life.

The spirit of *wisdom* will lead us to despise the honours, riches, and pleasures of this world, and to seek after heavenly joys.

The spirit of *understanding* will help us to penetrate the hidden things of Divine Truth, and to meditate on the mysteries God has revealed.

The spirit of *counsel* will show us how to escape the snares of our spiritual enemies, and direct us as to what we ought to do.

The spirit of *knowledge* will enable us to see and know God in all things, and to distinguish between good and evil.

The spirit of *fortitude* will strengthen us to bear trials, to overcome difficulties and temptations, and give us courage to confess CHRIST.

The spirit of *godliness* will fill us with a longing desire after God, and a delight in His service.

The spirit of *holy fear* will enable us to cast away earthly fear and human respect, and fill us with reverence and a filial dread of displeasing God.

2. God offers His grace in the Holy Sacraments and Ordinances of His Church, to all who approach them; but those who do so unworthily—that is, with a heart at enmity with God, without repentance and faith—are themselves putting a barrier in the way, which prevents their receiving the grace God offers, and thus draw down upon themselves His just displeasure.

NOTE.—There are many traditions respecting Simon Magus. He is called the '*father of heresy*' by the early Fathers, and is said to have originated the Gnostic heresy, which asserted that CHRIST'S Body was a mere phantom.

appearance, and not real flesh and blood. He is said to have had numerous subsequent encounters with S. P. and to have been defeated by the latter's miraculous power.

From the sin of Simon Magus is derived the *simony*, making spiritual functions matters of buying, selling, and bargaining, or seeking appointment to any function from corrupt motives.

LESSON XV.

The Ethiopian Eunuch.

Read Acts viii. 26-40. Learn v. 30, 31 ; 2 Tim. i. 13 ; Heb. x. 23.

1. *The Preacher in the Wilderness* (v. 26-34).

A strange command perhaps it appeared to S. Philip, that message of the angel just as his work had been crowned with such marked success, and multitudes in Samaria were looking to him to make known to them more fully the glad tidings of salvation : '*Arise, and go toward the south,*'—leave the crowded city, and go, not to populous Galilee, nor to any of the towns of Judæa, but to the southern extremity of Palestine,—'*the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert*' (v. 26).

The faithful servant of God does not hesitate ; he is as ready to leave his work at the Master's bidding as he was to undertake it ; no anxiety disturbs his mind as to what may befall the Christian community in Samaria during his absence. God can, if He so wills, provide others to minister to them in spiritual things, and carry on the work he has been permitted to begin. '*He arose and went*' (v. 27). We can think of him in the dreary, solitary desert, communing with God—lifting up his heart in prayer for those newly-confirmed converts in Samaria, and perhaps wondering what the purpose of God might be in bidding him undertake this journey.

Suddenly he hears the noise of an approaching caravan—a great nobleman, the treasurer of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, is returning to his own country. He is a proselyte, converted from heathenism to the Jewish faith, and he has been to Jerusalem to worship at one of the three great feasts, either the Passover, Pentecost, or the Feast

Tabernacles. He is accompanied by many armed followers and attendants : some run before to make ready the way ; others are leading camels ; a slave drives the chariot in which the great man himself is sitting, reading, probably aloud, according to Eastern custom, the sacred prophecy of Isaiah (ch. liii.).

Who could this mysterious Person be of whom the prophet spoke ?—that ‘tender plant,’ that ‘root out of a dry ground,’ who had ‘no form nor comeliness,’ ‘no beauty that we should desire Him’ ?—One who should be ‘despised and rejected of men,’ ‘a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief,’ bearing our griefs, carrying our sorrows, yet esteemed as one ‘stricken, smitten of God and afflicted’—One who should be ‘wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities,’ yet by whose ‘stripes we are healed’—One who was silent under oppression, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, and, as the true Scapegoat, bare all our iniquities, and was made sin for us—One who made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, yet whose soul was to be an offering for sin, and who should make intercession for the transgressors ?

Was the prophet speaking of himself, or did the words point to a suffering Messiah ? Troubled and perplexed, the Ethiopian Eunuch ponders over the sacred text. He could hardly have failed, during his visit to Jerusalem, to have heard of the new sect which proclaimed that Messiah had indeed come, and that He who had been crucified as a malefactor was none other than the CHRIST. The words he had been reading were strangely in accordance with their teaching.

Suddenly he is startled by a voice at his side abruptly putting the question, ‘*Understandest thou what thou readest*’ (v. 30) ?

It was S. Philip, who, in obedience to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had drawn near to the chariot, and had *heard the Eunuch* read the mysterious prophecy.

Probably the nobleman supposed his fellow-traveller to

be some Jewish Rabbi ; he at once showed his humility and readiness to learn, by the humble answer, '*How can I, except some man should guide me ?*' (v. 31) Then, ordering his chariot to stop, he courteously invited the stranger to enter it, and begged him to explain the difficult passage (v. 34).

Taking that very passage for his text, S. Philip '*preached unto him JESUS*' (v. 35), the Man of Sorrows, despised and rejected, yet bearing the iniquity of us all—obedient unto death, and yet the Conqueror of death, exalted to be the Saviour of mankind.

2. *The Baptism in the Wilderness* (v. 35–40).

The nobleman's heart was opened to receive the truth. He longed to make open confession of his faith, and to be enrolled among the followers of the Crucified.

As they journey, they come to a spring of water, an oasis in the desert: '*See, here is water,*' he eagerly exclaims; '*what doth hinder me to be baptized ?*' Then follows the full confession of faith required by the Church, even in those early times: '*I believe that JESUS CHRIST is the Son of GOD*' (v. 37).

It must have been a strange scene—this man of '*great authority,*' this chamberlain of Queen Candace, going down into the pool with S. Philip, and being baptized '*in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,*' while the throng of black attendants stood gazing with wonder and curiosity, their hearts also probably prepared to receive the truth.

The Eunuch goes on his homeward way rejoicing, all his doubts and perplexities have passed away, God's messenger has taught him the meaning of that word of God which was before as a sealed book to him ; he returns to his own land, carrying with him the glad tidings of salvation, to become the instrument of God in planting the Church in heathen Ethiopia. (It is probable that the Church in Abyssinia, the ancient Ethiopia, owes its origin to the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch.)

As to S. Philip, his mission accomplished, the Spirit of the LORD transported him from the desert to Azotus, and the

through the towns on the coast of the Mediterranean to Caesarea, everywhere preaching the Word, and labouring to extend CHRIST'S kingdom.

3. *The Church the Interpreter of Holy Scripture.*

GOD has not put the Bible into our hands and bid us find out from it what we must believe and do in order to be saved, each one for himself ; no, He has provided for us a sure guide and faithful interpreter of His Holy Word in His Church, which S. Paul declares to be the pillar and ground of the Truth (1 Tim. iii. 15). The Church has been divinely appointed to teach all nations (S. Matt. xxviii. 19), and she cannot err, for she is guided into all truth by the Spirit of Truth Himself, who dwells in her (S. John xvi. 13 ; xiv. 17, 26). If it were not for this divinely-appointed Guide, it would be impossible to find out which of the various interpretations of Scripture was the true one.

The Ethiopian Eunuch acknowledged his need of this guidance, when, in answer to S. Philip's question, '*Understandest thou what thou readest ?*' he replied, '*How can I, except some man should guide me ?*'

The chief truths of the Christian Faith are set forth by the Church in her Creeds. The Apostles' Creed is so called because of the general belief that it was drawn up by the Apostles themselves, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, before they separated one from another to teach all nations. It is quite certain from Holy Scripture that there must have been in Apostolic times some creed or form of sound words in general use. (Rom. vi. 17 ; xvi. 17 ; 2 Cor. xiii. 5 ; Eph. iv. 5, 13 ; Heb. x. 23 ; 2 Tim. i. 13 ; iv. 7 ; S. Jude 3, 20.)

The Nicene Creed and the Creed of S. Athanasius teach exactly the same truths as the Apostles' Creed. All three set forth the chief things which God has revealed as necessary to our salvation. The only difference is that the two former explain at greater length certain Articles of the Faith, *which were called in question by heresies arising from time to time, so that it became necessary for the Church to define them with greater clearness and at greater length.* Every

time we recite the Creed, we make an act of faith, a public profession of our belief in all the Articles of the Christian Faith, in those truths which God has revealed, and all of which we must believe faithfully if we would be saved (S. Mark xvi. 16, Athan. Creed). A firm belief in every Article of the Catholic Faith must be the groundwork out of which true holiness of life will spring. *'Without faith it is impossible to please GOD; for he that cometh to GOD must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him'* (Heb. xi. 6).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. We are but instruments in the hand of God. If He crowns our labours with success, we must give Him the glory, and be ready at His call to be laid aside if He so wills. He will not let His own work suffer, but will raise up others to carry on what He has permitted us to begin.

God's Providence orders and overrules all things ; nothing happens to us by *chance*. God has some special design for us to fulfil in all the various circumstances of our lives.

3. The love of GOD for each individual soul. S. Philip was taken from the crowded city to the lonely desert, that he might satisfy the desires of one soul anxiously inquiring after the truth. We can never tell what may be the result of the conversion of *one* soul to God, the careful training of *one* little child.

4. We should read a few verses of Holy Scripture every day, with prayer to GOD to teach us ; and ever seek to know more and more of the mysteries of our Holy Faith through the teaching of the Church.

NOTE.—Verse 37 is omitted in the Revised Version. It does not appear in the earliest MSS., and is considered, on good authority, to have been inadvertently inserted in the text from a marginal note ; but it is abundantly evident from Scripture that, even in Apostolic times, a distinct profession of faith, some *'form of sound words,'* was required of all who sought Holy Baptism. (Rom. vi. 17 ; Heb. x. 23 ; 2 Tim. i. 1-13.)

LESSON XVI.

The Heavenly Vision.

Read Acts ix. 1-9. Learn v. 4; S. Matt. xxv. 40; S. John v. 25.

1. *The Journey to Damascus* (v. 1-3).

It is mid-day, and the eastern sun is pouring its fiercest rays on a little band of travellers who are approaching the gates of Damascus. We have met with the leader of that little company before. We saw him in the Council consenting to the death of S. Stephen, and joining in the outcry raised against him. We marked him standing by, a witness to his martyrdom, and to his dying prayer for his enemies. We have seen him since, persecuting the followers of JESUS with relentless cruelty, women as well as men, committing them to prison, persecuting them even unto death. And now, armed with letters of authority from the Sanhedrim, he has undertaken a five or six days' journey from Jerusalem to Damascus, '*breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the LORD*' (v. 1), determined that, '*if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women,*' he would bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Perhaps the dying looks and words of, S. Stephen were even now haunting the conscience of the proud young Pharisee; but, if so, he tried to stifle all feelings of uneasiness in the excitement of a mistaken religious enthusiasm. '*I verily thought with myself,*' he says long years afterwards, '*that I ought to do many things contrary to the Name of JESUS Christ*' (ch. xxvi. 9). This enemy of CHRIST and His

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 Philistine, but
 I do my best
 to be just, self-
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is *obedient* to God;
 (ch. ix, 6.) The
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 who *hold the right*
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Church was, '*touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless*' (Phil. iii. 6), regular in the Temple—strict in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, trying to satisfy the requirements of the law, and yet all the while ignorant of the true spirit of God's commandments.

2. *The Light from Heaven* (v. 3-5).

Suddenly a flash of light, outshining even the noonday sun, is poured down from Heaven, and in the midst of this glory, seen by Saul alone, was that radiant Form and Countenance which, once seen, could never be forgotten. '*Have I not seen the LORD JESUS?*' he wrote, twenty years after this (1 Cor. ix. 1; xv. 8).

Dazzled by the intense brightness, Saul and his companions are struck down to the earth, while a Voice, clear and distinct in the Hebrew tongue, puts the searching question, '*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?*' (v. 4.) The companions of Saul see indeed the bright light, and are struck with fear; they hear a sound, perhaps as of thunder, but cannot distinguish any words (comp. v. 7 with xxii. 9). The vision was for Saul alone.

He alone saw the face of JESUS; he alone heard and understood the words that were addressed to him. '*Who art Thou, LORD?*' he exclaims in amazement. '*I am JESUS of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest,*' is the startling reply; '*it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*' (v. 5).

3. *Self-surrender* (v. 6-9).

Was it so? Was He who had been condemned and executed indeed very God of very God? Had he, Saul, been lifting his hand against the Messiah, fighting against GOD? '*LORD, what wilt Thou have me to do?*'

What strange words to fall from the lips of the proud, self-righteous Pharisee! He gives himself without reserve to that Master against whom, in his blindness, he had fought, and submits to whatever directions he may receive from Him.

Little by little, that Master's purpose shall be unfolded, and first, as a test of his humility and obedience, he is bidden to *'rise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do'* (v. 6).

The Voice ceases—the vision fades away ; Saul arises from the earth, but the heavenly light has blinded him. He opens his eyes, but their sight is gone—fit emblem of that spiritual blindness which had possessed him until this hour.

See him, with tears of contrition streaming from his sightless eyes, groping for a hand to guide him—blind, and utterly dependent ! So he enters the gate of Damascus—no longer proud and bitter—a blind, broken-down man, led by the hand to his lodging.

Picture him during the next three days *'without sight,'* refusing all food, lamenting that spiritual blindness which had led him to persecute CHRIST and His Church with such fury—his *'sin ever before him'*—*'abhorring himself'*—*'his iniquities, like a sore burden, too heavy for him to bear'* (Job xlii. 5, 6 ; Ps. xxxii. 3-5 ; xxxviii. 3, 4 ; li. 1-4). If *'Paul the aged,'* at the close of his life, when he was *'ready to be offered,'* and the time of his *'departure was at hand'* (2 Tim. iv. 6), could speak of himself as the *'chief of sinners'* (1 Tim. i. 15), what must have been the agony of shame and penitence endured during those first three days of his conversion to a new life ?

But was no relief given him in this utter misery ? Did no ray of light pierce that thick darkness and bring him comfort and peace ? Yes, there was something for his mind to dwell upon during those three days, besides the thought of his sin. He had seen the Face, he had heard the Voice, of JESUS—he was convinced by the Vision that He who hung upon the Cross of Calvary was indeed exalted at the right hand of the Father to be a Prince and a Saviour (Acts v. 31), Man to suffer, God to save, and therefore he need not despair. It is of this crisis in his life that S. Paul *speaks when he tells us that he had been 'crucified with*

CHRIST' (Gal. ii. 20), a '*partaker of His sufferings*' (2 Cor. i. 7; see also Rom. vi. 4-6; Gal. vi. 14; Phil. iii. 10; Col. iii. 3); all these passages bearing witness to the spiritual anguish of those three days, in which his whole past self, with all its pride and wilfulness, had been crushed to death.

Perhaps it was also during this solemn time of darkness that those visions and revelations were vouchsafed, when he describes himself as being '*caught up into the third heaven,*' and hearing unspeakable words which it was not possible for man to utter (2 Cor. xii. 1-4).

4. *Conversion.*

Conversion is a turning of the will *towards* God. When we sin, our will is turned away or *averted* from God; therefore *conversion*, or turning to God, is the first step in true repentance, the first turning of the soul towards home. But this is only the beginning of the new life. A true conversion consists not only of the first drawing of the soul to repentance, but the carrying out of the life of penitence, leading on, as with S. Paul, to contrition, confession, and amendment of life.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. The first sign of a true conversion is *obedience* to God: '*LORD, what wilt Thou have me to do?*' (ch. ix. 6.) The second sign is *humility*, in accepting instruction from those who are appointed to give it: '*it shall be told thee what thou must do*' (v. 6). The third sign is the faithful and diligent use of Sacraments, and means of grace: '*he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized*' (v. 18).

2. The grace of GOD has power to change the hardest heart. We should never think ourselves better than others, or despair of any, or give up praying for them, for the most hardened sinner may become, through the grace of God, one of His chiefest saints.

3. CHRIST'S members are one with Himself. Those who *injure and persecute the Church, or any individual member*

of the Church, are injuring and persecuting the Head of the Church; those who serve and minister to their needs, are serving Him, and ministering to Him (S. Matt. xxv. 31-46).

NOTE.—The latter part of v. 5 and part of v. 6 are omitted in the Revised Version. They are given in ch. xxii. 10, and xxvi. 14, and were probably inserted here in some MSS. for the sake of making a complete narrative; '*the pricks*' are rather the sharp-pointed goads used in driving oxen. The phrase, '*it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,*' is a Greek proverb expressive of the impotent rage which hurts itself instead of its object. The words clearly imply that Saul's conscience was not at ease.

LESSON XVII.

The Chosen Vessel.

Read Acts ix. 10-30. Learn Rom. vi. 4-6; Gal. ii. 20; Col. iii. 3, 4.

1. Behold, he prayeth (v. 10-16).

The prayer of the broken and contrite heart ascends before the Throne of the Most High, and, in answer to his petition, Saul of Tarsus sees in a vision one named Ananias, putting his hand on him and healing him.

On the third day the vision is fulfilled. A certain disciple named Ananias, one who possibly was among the Jewish converts on the Day of Pentecost, or who had been forced to flee from Jerusalem on account of the persecution which raged there, was bidden by the LORD in a vision to seek out the blind Pharisee in the street called Straight, in the house of Judas, and to admit him by Holy Baptism into the fold of CHRIST.

Ananias hesitates; the evil report of the dreaded persecutor's doings in the Holy City had reached Damascus; the disciples were fully aware of the evil he had done to the 'saints in Jerusalem,' and also that he had come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to imprison all who called on the Name of JESUS (v. 13, 14).

'Go thy way,' was the cheering answer, 'for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake' (v. 15, 16).

Such was the glowing picture sketched out for the great Apostle by the LORD, who had rescued him with His own hand from the ranks of His enemies.

The great Apostle was not '*disobedient unto the heavenly vision*' (ch. xxvi. 19). Wonderful, indeed, is the record he has left us of the labours and sufferings of his after-life (2 Cor. vi. 4, 5 ; xi. 23-28).

'All elements of danger, all details of adventure, all anxieties and toils, seem summed up in his one person. The deserts have seen him struggling with their sand-storms ; the rivers have been breasted by his arm ; the deep has held him hour after hour, drifting solitary on its surface. Again and again ocean has cast him shipwrecked to land, and land has yielded him full of fresh, holy enterprise to ocean. Disputing in the synagogue, working at the hair-cloth loom, singing at midnight in the prison, kneeling and mingling his tears with his farewell prayers on the Syrian or Milesian shore, preaching amidst the marble temples on Mars' Hill at Athens, thanking God and taking courage on the broad stones of the Appian Way ; clanking his chain as he writes in his hired house at Rome—where, and in what employ, do we not find this strange, fervent man, this vessel of God's election, for the second founding of His Church ? '*

And yet his bodily presence, he tells us, was weak, and his '*speech contemptible*' (2 Cor. x. 1, 10). He was afflicted from the time of his conversion with some mysterious malady, of which he speaks as a '*thorn in the flesh—a messenger of Satan*' sent to buffet him—an infirmity which, though earnestly prayed against, was yet allowed to remain, that the strength of God might be made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. xii. 7-9).

2. *The New Birth from Above* (v. 17-19).

Ananias went his way, no doubt praising and blessing God for the victory His grace had wrought in changing the *furious persecutor* into the humble penitent. He enters the

* *Alford's 'Study of the New Testament.'*

house, stands by the side of the blind man, and in the exercise of the authority committed to him, he lays his hands on those sightless eyes, exclaiming, '*Brother Saul, the LORD, even JESUS, who appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost*' (v. 17).

And lo ! his eyes are opened ; he wakes from his three days' darkness ; he obeys the exhortation of his spiritual guide, who bids him arise to newness of life and wash away his sins in Holy Baptism, calling on the Name of the LORD (ch. xxii. 16).

For though S. Paul owed his conversion to a special interposition of our LORD Himself, yet his sins could not be put away ; he could not be enrolled among the disciples until he had made use of the appointed means of grace, and received the '*new birth unto righteousness*,' through the sacrament of Baptism. And this sacrament was to be administered, not by one of the Apostles, but by an obscure disciple of whom nothing is known beyond his connection with the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

(The close connection of Baptism with the forgiveness of sins and renewing grace is frequently pointed out in Holy Scripture. (Acts ii. 38 ; xxii. 16 ; Heb. x. 22 : Eph. v. 26 ; Tit. iii. 5.) In ch. xxii. 11 S. Paul ascribes his blindness to the glory of the heavenly light ; and some have thought that his constant employment of an amanuensis, and the mention of the large characters in which he wrote in his Epistle to the Galatians, are indications that the Apostle suffered permanently in his eyesight from the heavenly vision. The words in Gal. vi. 11 should rather be rendered, '*Ye see in what large letters I have written to you.*'))

3. *Newness of Life* (v. 20-22).

The furious persecutor had become a zealous preacher of the Word. Burning to make known to others the message of salvation, he enters straightway the synagogues of Damascus, and proclaims JESUS to be the Son of GOD. H

fame as a persecutor was well known to the Jews of Damascus, and the authorities of the synagogues were probably prepared to welcome him as a zealous agent. What, then, was their amazement to hear him preach the Faith which once he tried to destroy ! Wonderfully fitted by his education and learning for the mission to which he had been called, '*Saul increased the more in strength,*' confounding the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, and showing them plainly from their own Scriptures that JESUS was indeed the CHRIST.

4. *The Work of Preparation* (Gal. i. 15-17).

After His baptism our Blessed LORD was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness before entering upon His public ministry ; so must S. Paul retire into the deserts of Arabia, there to prepare, in solitude and secret communing with God, for the great work which lay before him. There he appears to have remained for a period of three years, lost sight of by the world, and receiving by direct communication from our LORD Himself, those facts relating to His Incarnation, Death, Burial, and Resurrection, which he distinctly tells us he received, not through any human instrumentality, but by the revelation of JESUS CHRIST (1 Cor. xv. 1-9 ; Gal. i. 11, 12). That solemn time of retirement ended, S. Paul returns to Damascus to recommence his labours. The Jews, enraged at this second visit, and foiled by him in argument, form a conspiracy to kill him. Day and night the gates are closely watched, lest their enemy should escape, but the disciples lowered him in a basket from the window of a house on the city wall, and thus he escaped to Jerusalem (2 Cor. xi. 33).

5. *S. Peter and S. Paul* (Gal. i. 18-22).

Picture the thoughts of the fugitive from Damascus, as he enters those gates of Jerusalem from which he had gone forth three years before, breathing out threatenings and slaughter *against the disciples* of the LORD ; think of his act *of contrition and self-humiliation* as he perhaps passes the

very spot where he had assisted at the execution of the first martyr! His great desire was to 'see Peter,' no doubt to hear from his lips many details he longed to know of the life of JESUS of Nazareth (Gal. i. 18).

But the disciples were afraid of him, they held aloof, he was '*unknown by face unto the Churches of Judea which were in CHRIST*' (Gal. i. 22); the memory of the evil he had done in days gone by was still fresh in the minds of all, and the disciples at Jerusalem were apparently unaware of his conversion and subsequent labours at Damascus.

One friend, however, came to his side. Barnabas, the '*son of consolation*,' whom he may have known in former years, for between Tarsus and Cyprus there was constant communication, introduced him to S. Peter and S. James (Gal. i. 18, 19), and told them the story of his miraculous conversion. He was then received into the fellowship of the Church (Acts ix. 28), and at once began to '*speak boldly in the Name of the LORD JESUS*,' disputing against the Grecians, those Greek-Jews at whose instigation S. Stephen had been put to death.

Now he who had consented to that martyrdom was exposed to a like persecution (v. 29). Willingly would he have stayed at the risk of his own life, for his heart's desire and prayer was that '*Israel might be saved*' (Rom. x. 1), but his LORD and Master had other work for him to do. After remaining the guest of S. Peter for fifteen days, as he prayed in the Temple he fell into a trance, and saw the LORD bidding him '*make haste out of Jerusalem*,' for that his testimony would not be received (ch. xxii. 17, 18).

He must go '*far hence unto the Gentiles, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*' (ch. xxvi. 18). Instructed by this heavenly mission, S. Paul left Jerusalem at once for Cesarea, and thence to his native city Tarsus, where we lose sight of him for seven years, during which the Holy Ghost was preparing him for the work of an Apostle.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. God's ordinances must never be laid aside. The Sacraments are the ordained channels of His grace, the means which He has appointed of uniting us to Himself.

2. God has a distinct purpose or vocation for each individual soul. Our one aim must be to find out by prayer and waiting upon His will, what is that calling or vocation, and then faithfully to fulfil it in dependence on His grace. Like S. Paul, not to be disobedient unto the heavenly vision, whatever it may cost us.

3. God's work in the soul is gradual. S. Paul waited ten years between his conversion and his ordination by the laying-on of hands for the work of an Apostle (Acts xiii. 2, 3). Those who would work for God must prepare themselves by prayer, and retirement, and meditation on heavenly things. All God's saints, as well as the King of Saints, had special seasons for retirement and prayer. (Examples: Moses, Elijah, S. John Baptist, our Blessed LORD's Fasting and Temptation, and frequent retirement into the wilderness.)

4. We should be always ready to believe the *best* instead of the *worst* of others, and do all in our power to remove any suspicion or misunderstanding, after the example of S. Barnabas, who stood by S. Paul when others held aloof.

NOTE.—All baptized persons are called '*saints*' in the New Testament, as dedicated and consecrated to God in Holy Baptism, forming a part of the Body of CHRIST (Acts ix. 13, 32, 41; Eph. i. 1; Phil. i. 1; Col. i. 1; and many other passages).

LESSON XVIII.

The Raising of Dorcas.

Read Acts ix. 31-43. Learn Ps. xli. 1; Rom. viii. 11; Gal. vi. 10.

1. *Rest from Persecution* (v. 31).

For a short time '*the Church throughout all Judæa, and Galilee, and Samaria, had peace*' (v. 31). It was a season of rest and of spiritual growth, of building up '*in the fear of the LORD, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.*'

This temporary lull in the storm of persecution was caused by the attention of the Jews being for a time turned from the Christians, in order to resist the attempt made by the heathen Emperor Caligula to have his statue erected in the Temple at Jerusalem. Actuated by an insane vanity, this Emperor claimed divine worship, and caused temples to be built, and statues set up in his honour throughout the Empire. The Roman legions were actually marching against Jerusalem to enforce the carrying out of the Emperor's edict, and the profanation of the Temple was only averted by the determined opposition of the Jews, and the intercession of King Herod Agrippa.

2. *A Visitation Tour* (v. 32-35).

During this time of comparative quiet, S. Peter left Jerusalem to visit and strengthen the faith of the Christian converts in the towns of Saron, or Sharon, the large fertile plain which extends along the coast between the mountain

of Judæa and Ephraim, and the Mediterranean Sea (Cant. ii. 1; Isa. xxxiii. 9; xxxv. 2; lxv. 10).

At Lydda, a town on the road from Jerusalem to Joppa, he finds a poor man lying sick of the palsy. For eight long years Eneas had been paralysed, helpless, unable to move. S. Peter stands by his bedside, and says to the sick man, '*Eneas, JESUS CHRIST maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately*' (v. 34).

The Apostle is careful, as in the cure of the cripple at the Temple gate (ch. iii. 6), to make known that he is but the messenger and instrument: the Healer is CHRIST. He who cured many '*sick of the palsy*' while on earth (S. Matt. iv. 24; ix. 2-7), now cures one from heaven by the hand of His Apostle, thus fulfilling His promise S. Mark xvi. 17-20.

The report of this miracle spread far and wide; the poor paralysed man, who for eight years had been unable to move, was doubtless well known to the dwellers at Lydda and its neighbourhood, and the hearts of many who saw or heard of the miracle were touched, and turned to the LORD.

3. S. Peter at Joppa (v. 36-43).

From Lydda, S. Peter, in compliance with an urgent request for his presence, proceeds to Joppa, one of the great seaports on the coast of Palestine, the place where King Hiram's cedar-wood for the Temple was landed (2 Chron. ii. 16), and where Jonah embarked when he desired to flee from the presence of God (Jonah i. 3).

Here he found the Church in great sorrow. A holy woman named Tabitha, or Dorcas, who had endeared herself to all the disciples by devoting her life to works of mercy and ministries of love, had lately fallen sick and died. Great were the lamentations of the little Christian community over her death; and, hearing that S. Peter was at Lydda, they at once despatched two messengers, entreating him to come to them without delay, and comfort them in their trouble.

What a contrast was this Christian sorrow to the noisy demonstrations of grief which S. Peter had once witnessed

in the house of Jairus (S. Matt. ix. 23). He finds the lifeless body reverently laid on a bier in an 'upper chamber,' probably the church or oratory where the disciples were accustomed to assemble for the worship of God, while round the bier are gathered the mourners—those whom Dorcas had taught and fed and clothed, while she was yet with them.

The Apostle puts them all forth ; he kneels before the altar in silent prayer ; then, rising from his knees and turning to the body, he exclaims, '*Tabitha, arise.*' Life returns, the colour comes back to the pale cheeks, her eyes slowly open—she sees the Apostle standing by her side—she sits up. S. Peter gives her his hand and lifts her up ; then, calling the astonished '*saints and widows,*' he presents her alive. The report of the wonderful miracle spreads through the city of Joppa, and many by its means are won to the faith of CHRIST.

Perhaps it was to confirm these new disciples in the Faith, and teach them more fully the mysteries of the Gospel, that S. Peter remained for a time at Joppa, staying in the house of one Simon, a tanner. (The trade of a tanner was held in abhorrence by the Jews—so much so that, if any man became a tanner, his wife could claim a divorce. His taking up his abode in the house of a *tanner* shows that S. Peter was prepared to set aside Jewish prejudices and usages as of little moment.)

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. The power exercised by the Church is derived entirely from her union with CHRIST. When CHRIST raised the dead, He did it by His own Almighty power as GOD (S. Mark v. 41 ; S. Luke vii. 14 ; S. John xi. 43) ; but when the Apostles worked miracles it was in the Name of JESUS CHRIST, by His power and authority committed to them (Acts iii. 6, 12, 16 ; ix. 34). All spiritual power exercised by the Church, all due administrations of the Sacraments, are from the same source ; therefore, with the exception of Holy Baptism, none

but those who are duly ordained to any office or ministry in the Church can administer the Sacraments, which are the channels of God's grace.

2. Spiritual life and healing is a far greater gain than any temporal blessing. Though extraordinary manifestations of the working of the Holy Spirit are not granted in our time, the same Holy Spirit works as powerfully as of old in convincing souls of sin, and uniting them to their Saviour.

3. The death of the soul is a far worse evil than the death of the body. Those who are living in sin are really *dead*; they neither *see* their danger, nor *hear* the voice of God, nor *feel* His love, nor *speak* to Him in prayer and praise, nor *do* His will. All who really love God should be earnest in prayer for those who never pray for themselves, that CHRIST may call them back to life, and the Holy Ghost, the LORD and Giver of Life, may breathe fresh life into their souls.

4. The poor, the sick, and the suffering are CHRIST's representatives; we should deem it an honour and a privilege, like Dorcas, to minister to their necessities. CHRIST will say of all who have devoted their lives to their service for love of Him, '*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me*' (S. Matt. xxv. 40).

'I in your care My brethren left,
Not willing ye should be bereft
Of waiting on your LORD.
The meanest offering ye can make—
A cup of water—for love's sake,
In heaven, be sure, is stored.'

LESSON XIX.

Seeking after God.

Read Acts x. 1-23. Learn Mal. iii. 16 ; Rev. viii. 3, 4.

1. *Cornelius the Centurion* (ch. x. 1, 2).

Thirty miles from Joppa, on the sea coast, was built the fine city of Cæsarea, beautified and enlarged by Herod the Great, and named in honour of Augustus Cæsar. The Roman conquerors had made it the capital of the conquered province of Judæa, and garrisoned it with their troops. (The Cæsarea of the Acts must be distinguished from Cæsarea Philippi at the foot of Mount Hermon.—S. Matt. xvi. 13.)

An officer in this garrison, the centurion of the band called the Italian band, Cornelius by name, had given up the worship of false gods, and had become a worshipper of the true God ; not, however, a proselyte ; he was still a Gentile, and uncircumcised (v. 45 ; xi. 3). He was a devout man, leading a godly life ; he feared God, with all his house, instructing them in the worship of God ; and gave much alms to the Jewish people, among whom he lived, like that other centurion of whom it was said, '*He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue*' (S. Luke vii. 5). Nor was this all ; '*he prayed to God alway*' ; not only at the stated hours of prayer, but continually lifting up his heart to God, earnestly desiring further teaching and deeper knowledge of the truth.

2. *The Vision of Cornelius* (v. 3-8).

God, in His love and pity, was listening to the prayers of that Gentile centurion. About the ninth hour of the day

(3 P.M., the hour of the evening sacrifice), as he seeks God in fasting and prayer, he is rewarded by a glorious vision. An Angel in bright clothing stands before him and calls him by name—‘Cornelius!’ The heavenly vision fills him with fear, and he asks, tremblingly, ‘*What is it, LORD?*’

The Angel answers, ‘*Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before GOD.*’ Yes, the prayers and the alms of that Roman centurion, Gentile though he was, uncircumcised, outside the pale of the chosen people, had been offered as sweet incense by the Angel who presents the prayers of all saints upon the golden Altar before the Throne on high (Rev. viii. 3, 4; v. 8).

Cornelius had prayed for more knowledge and greater light. The Angel bids him send for one who will teach him all things necessary to salvation. Cornelius is not to be instructed directly from heaven; the Angel is not commissioned to tell him that which he desires to know. Nor is he bidden to become a disciple of any famous rabbi or teacher of the law. No! ‘*GOD hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and GOD hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty*’ (1 Cor. i. 27–29). He is directed to send for one Simon, surnamed Peter, lodging with one Simon, a tanner, at Joppa, who shall teach him that by which he and all his house shall be saved (ch. xi. 14). Cornelius had been faithful to the light vouchsafed to him, and therefore a greater measure of light was now to be his.

The Angel departed, and Cornelius does not hesitate. Filled with joy and thankfulness at this assurance of the love and favour of GOD, he calls two of his household servants and a devout soldier, imparts to them the glad tidings, and bids them hasten to fulfil the directions of the Angel.

3. *The Vision of S. Peter* (v. 9–23).

The day following, S. Peter, praying on the house-top of Simon the tanner at the sixth hour, falls into a trance or

ecstasy, and sees heaven opened, and, as it were, a great sheet let down from heaven to earth, wherein are all manner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things of the earth, and fowls of the heaven. While the Apostle gazes on the strange sight, there comes a Voice to him : '*Rise, Peter ; kill and eat.*' '*Not so, LORD,*' is the answer ; '*for I have never eaten anything that is common and unclean.*' Again the Voice is heard : '*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*'

Three times was the vision repeated, in order that no doubt might remain in the Apostle's mind, and then the vessel was received up again into heaven.

While S. Peter, roused from his trance, was wondering what the vision which he had seen might mean, the three men sent by Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and were now standing outside the gate (for, as Gentiles, they could not, without giving great offence, enter a Jewish dwelling), asking whether Simon which was surnamed Peter were lodging there.

When the message was brought to him, the Spirit bade him '*Go with these three men, doubting nothing, for I have sent them*' (v. 20). The Apostle obeyed, and, having heard the message of Cornelius, he showed his disregard of Jewish prejudices by inviting the strangers into the house, and the following day accompanied them to *Cæsarea*, taking with him six brethren as witnesses of what God's purposes might be with regard to the reception of Gentiles into the Church.

4. *The Church Universal.*

The vision of S. Peter represents the Church Universal throughout the world. The white linen sheet was let down from heaven, for the origin of the Church is from above. It was drawn up again into heaven ; for after the Church has fulfilled her mission on earth, she will be received up and glorified in heaven.

The four corners of the sheet signify the extension of the Church to the four quarters of the globe ; the whole animal

creation, represented as cleansed, signified that all differences were henceforth to be done away ; there was to be no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile, but in every nation *'he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him'* (v. 35).

S. Peter is commanded to *'kill and eat,'* to teach him that, through his ministry, the Gentiles were to be incorporated into the Church or Body of Christ, for to S. Peter the commission had been given to open the door of the Church, or kingdom of heaven, to all nations (S. Matt. xvi. 19).

The circumstances attending the conversion of S. Paul and that of Cornelius are in many ways very similar. Saul sees in a vision one named Ananias coming in to restore his sight. Cornelius is directed in a vision to send for Simon surnamed Peter. Thus each receives a sign that the vision is a reality. Ananias at Damascus and S. Peter at Joppa are also instructed by means of a vision as to the course they are to pursue. Both are at first reluctant to obey the vision. Ananias has heard how much evil Saul has done to the saints. S. Peter is unwilling to eat anything common or unclean. In each case also the blessing is bestowed in answer to prayer. *'Behold, he prayeth,'* is said of Saul. *'Cornelius, thy prayer is heard,'* is the greeting of the Angel.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. GOD overrules and foreordains even the smallest details of our lives. Nothing is beneath His notice. Ananias is directed to find Saul in a certain house in a street called Straight ; the Angel who speaks to Cornelius is well acquainted with the humble abode of Simon the tanner by the sea-side at Joppa.

2. The holy Angels are God's messengers, continually employed by Him in ministering to us on earth, taking the deepest interest in all that concerns us, protecting us from

dangers, both to our souls and bodies, and presenting our prayers before the Throne of God (Ps. xci. 11 ; S. Luke i. 19 ; xv. 10 ; S. Matt. xviii. 10 ; Acts v. 19 ; xii. 7 ; xxyii. 23 ; Heb. i. 14 ; Rev. v. 11, 12 ; viii. 3).

3. Prayer should be accompanied by fasting and almsgiving. If our prayers are earnest and sincere, they will certainly reach the Throne of Grace, and be abundantly answered ; for GOD is always more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than either we desire or deserve.

4. We should ever be obedient to the inspirations of God's Holy Spirit, ever willing to be taught, laying aside all prejudices, and trusting to GOD to remove all difficulties which seem to hinder us from carrying out His purposes.

NOTES.—The 'house-top' (v. 9) was the flat roof universal in the East, and was used for various purposes (Josh. ii. 6 ; Judg. xvi. 27 ; 1 Sam. ix. 25 ; 2 Sam. xi. 2 ; 2 Kings xxiii. 12 ; Neh. viii. 16 ; Isa. xv. 3 ; Jer. xix. 13 ; xlviii. 38 ; Zeph. i. 5 ; S. Matt. x. 27).

Though there were clean as well as unclean animals presented to S. Peter (v. 12), the clean were defiled by contact with the unclean, and S. Peter could not therefore touch any without breaking the Jewish law (Lev. xi. 24, 32-34).

LESSON XX.

The Calling of the Gentiles.

Read Acts x. 24-48 ; xi. 1-18. Learn Isa. xlix. 6 ; Eph. ii. 14, 17-22.

1. S. Peter's Reception (ch. x. 24-33).

Picture Cornelius anxiously awaiting the return of his messengers. He has called his friends and relations around him, for he is anxious that they should share in his blessings. As S. Peter approaches the house, Cornelius goes out to meet him, and, moved by a feeling of deep reverence towards God's messenger, falls at his feet to worship him.

But S. Peter, like S. Paul and S. Barnabas on a later occasion (ch. xiv. 11-15), refuses to accept such homage ; he raises him up quickly, exclaiming, '*Stand up ; I myself also am a man.*' Cornelius was quite aware of the dislike of the Jews to associate with the Gentiles ; it was for this reason that his messengers had been instructed to stand outside the house of Simon until they were invited to enter (v. 17-23) ; and in his going forth to meet and converse with S. Peter we recognise that same spirit of humility which so distinguished another Roman centurion (S. Luke vii. 6) ; he did not consider himself worthy to invite him under his roof.

But S. Peter had learnt from the vision he had so lately seen that he was no longer to call any man common or *unclean* ; he therefore entered the centurion's house without

scruple, and heard from his lips the account of the heavenly vision with which he had been favoured.

2. *S. Peter's Address* (ch. x. 34-43).

To that earnest and devout congregation assembled in the centurion's house, S. Peter preaches the Gospel of CHRIST. Probably it was not the first time that Cornelius had heard of JESUS of Nazareth; he had very likely attended the Roman governor when he visited Jerusalem for the purpose of keeping order there at the annual Feasts. He might even have met with the faithful centurion of Capernaum (S. Luke vii. 2-9), or with the centurion who stood by the Cross (S. Matt. xxvii. 54), or possibly he had conversed with the soldiers who had assisted at the Crucifixion, and who, while they watched the Sepulchre, had become unwilling witnesses of the Resurrection.

In this address to uncircumcised Gentiles, S. Peter is careful to represent the *Jews* as receiving the first offer of the Gospel of CHRIST (v. 36). He then goes on to sum up all the articles of the Creed, telling his hearers that JESUS is the CHRIST, the LORD of all—sent to reconcile the world to God—preached by S. John Baptist—anoined by the Holy Spirit—manifesting His power by miracles—crucified—raised from the dead—seen alive after His Resurrection—ordained to be the Judge of quick and dead (v. 36-42). And the message of peace first preached unto Israel as GOD's chosen people was now extended to all who would receive it. Jew and Gentile were henceforth alike in the sight of God, for '*through His Name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins*' (v. 43).

3. *The Baptism of Cornelius* (ch. x. 44-48).

Before S. Peter's discourse was ended, the same great gift was poured forth upon those uncircumcised Gentiles as had been given to the hundred and twenty in the Upper

Room on the Day of Pentecost. To the amazement of the six companions of S. Peter, the descent of the Holy Ghost upon these Gentiles was made manifest by the same signs which had been vouchsafed to the believers in Jerusalem. '*They heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God*' (v. 46).

Yet, though the gift of the Holy Spirit had been so apparent, S. Peter does not omit the outward sign which CHRIST had ordained as the means of admission into His Church (S. John iii. 5 ; S. Matt. xxviii. 19).

'*Can any man forbid the water,*' he asks, '*that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we*' (v. 47.) '*And he commanded them to be baptized in the Name of the LORD*' (v. 48).

It is evident from Holy Scripture, that the Apostles did not usually baptize with their own hands—partly, perhaps, lest they should be supposed to be desirous of forming sects of those whom they had baptized (1 Cor. i. 12-17), and partly also lest after their death it might have been imagined that Baptism had lost some of its efficacy, being no longer administered by those who had been called by CHRIST, and had received extraordinary graces of the Holy Ghost.

Being baptized '*in the Name of the LORD*' does not mean that they were not baptized into the Name of the Holy Trinity. Our Blessed LORD's instructions leave no doubt on this point (S. Matt. xxviii. 19). The words simply mean they were baptized according to the Baptism which He instituted (comp. ch. xix. 2-5).

The extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Ghost before Baptism on the first Gentile converts was a special and solitary instance, in order to authorise S. Peter to admit Cornelius and the other Gentiles into the Church of CHRIST. When his conduct was afterwards called in question, this was his unanswerable argument (ch. xi. 17). S. Peter would not have ventured to baptize those who were uncircumcised *unless he had heard* them prophesying, and had seen the

Holy Ghost resting upon them. It is not usually God's will to bestow the grace of Sacraments on any but by the Sacraments; yet, at the same time, He Himself is the Source and Giver of grace; and though men are tied to the use of the means which God has been pleased to appoint for the reception of Divine grace, yet His Power is not tied even to the most sacred Divine ordinances (S. John iii. 8).

4. *S. Peter's Defence* (ch. xi. 1-18).

Strange news reaches the ears of the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem, that Peter, the chief of the Apostles, had consented to become the guest of a Gentile—had eaten bread in his house—had preached CHRIST unto him—and, strangest of all, had admitted him, though uncircumcised, to Holy Baptism. Such a total disregard of Jewish law and ritual shocked the Jewish Christians beyond measure. As soon as S. Peter returned to Jerusalem the charge was brought against him: '*Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them*' (v. 3).

The Apostle met the accusation with meekness and gentleness. He explained the matter fully to his fellow-countrymen, showing how clearly he had followed the guiding hand of CHRIST, and so convinced them that God had admitted the Gentiles to the like privileges with themselves, that all their prejudices were overcome. They held their peace, and glorified God, saying, '*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*' (v. 18).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. The priests of the Church are ambassadors of CHRIST, stewards of the mysteries of GOD (1 Cor. iv. 1; 2 Cor. v. 20), and should therefore be held in special honour and respect. Cornelius, as his name implies, was probably of noble birth, yet he was willing to be taught by a Jew of low birth, and

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The coming of the Gentiles is frequently dwelt
upon in Old Testament prophecy. (See Gen. xii. 3; xiii.
18; Ps. lxxviii. 1; Isai. xlii. 1; lxxvii. 31; xevi. 3, 10;
Isai. lii. 2, 3; xl. 5; xli. 8, 7; lx. 1-3; Mal. i. 11.)
Christ had spoken plainly, both to the Jews and to His
disciples, about it. (S. Matt. viii. 11; xxiv. 14; xxviii. 19;
S. Mark xvi. 15; S. Luke xxiv. 47; Acts i. 8.) But even
the disciples were not prepared to see the wall of prejudice
which had hitherto separated Jew from Gentile
removed, they imagined that circumcision was
necessary condition of entering into covenant.

The teaching of the Rabbis was carried out
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So exclusive had the Jews become at this time, that contemporary historians say 'they would not show the way except to their fellow-religionists, nor guide any but a circumcised person to a fountain of which he was in search, and they cherished against all mankind the hatred of enemies.'



LESSON XXI.

The Church in Antioch.

Read Acts xi. 19-29. Learn 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25 ; 1 Pet. iv. 14, 16.

1. *The Mother-Church of the Gentile World* (v. 19).

From Jerusalem to Samaria, and further still, to Damascus, and to the cities on the shores of the Mediterranean, even as far as Antioch in the north of Syria, did those disciples travel who had been scattered abroad by persecution after the martyrdom of S. Stephen. Now, Antioch in those days was a very great city. In rank and population it was the *third* city in the Empire, yielding precedence only to Rome and Alexandria. Beautifully situated on the River Orontes, with a high mountain towering above it, and possessing ready communication with the Mediterranean, Antioch lay on the great thoroughfare of the nations in constant intercourse with Rome, and was the meeting-place of the Eastern and Western portions of the great Roman Empire.

Luxurious Romans had built their villas along the banks of its beautiful river ; it abounded in handsome streets, magnificent buildings, gardens, statues, fountains, and shady groves. All that was beautiful in nature and in art seemed gathered together in that pleasure-loving city, whose inhabitants were looked upon as the most frivolous and dissolute in the whole Empire. Strange costumes might be seen, *strange languages* heard at all times in its streets, in which

people from all parts of the world jostled against one another. Roman soldiers, Phœnician sailors, Greek artists, Jewish merchants, Syrian vine-dressers, wood-cutters from Lebanon, negro slaves, Arabs, astrologers, and fortune-tellers from the far East, made it their home ; yet this gay, pleasure-loving city, so steeped in wickedness, was chosen by God to become the great Mission-centre and Mother-Church of the Gentile world.

2. *The New Name* (v. 20-26).

Those first sowers of the seed who travelled as far as Antioch were not all Jews ; some were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who gathered a congregation of believers from among the Grecian or Greek-speaking Jews. (There is much diversity of opinion as to whether the word translated *Grecians* (v. 20) should not rather be *Greeks*, according to the reading of many MSS. The former word signifies Greek-speaking Jews and proselytes ; the latter, the heathen. On the whole, it seems improbable that the *Gentiles*, are intended ; for if the reception of a single Gentile, Cornelius, and of a Jew with him at Cæsarea, made such a commotion in the Church, it is probable that the reception of the multitude at Antioch would have made more stir had they been Gentiles. Besides this, it is clear that S. Barnabas did not receive his mission to the Gentiles until after this had taken place (ch. xiii. 2, 46) ; and in ch. xiv. 27, Paul and Barnabas announce that God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, which would have been no news to them if those converted on a previous occasion had been Gentiles. There seems a peculiar fitness in this conversion of a large body of Hellenists or Greek-speaking Jews at this time, for S. Stephen owed his martyrdom, and S. Paul his persecution and flight from Jerusalem, to this very class ; and now they are rescued from the death of sin, and brought to the saving knowledge of the Gospel, by those very people whom, in their mistaken zeal, they had persecuted, and who had now come from Jerusalem to seek and to save them in their own homes.)

Presently the glad tidings of this further extension of the Gospel of CHRIST reach the ears of the Church at Jerusalem, and they send Barnabas to Antioch, in order that he may examine and instruct these new converts in the faith, and give the sanction and direction of the Mother-Church at Jerusalem to the work which had been begun.

S. Barnabas, being a native of Cyprus, was peculiarly fitted, both by the circumstances of his birth, as well as by his own personal character (ch. iv. 36 ; ix. 27 ; xi. 24), for this mission. When he saw the wonderful effects of the grace of God, exhibited in the faith and in the holy lives of these new disciples, he rejoiced exceedingly, and exhorted them all to hold fast their faith, and allow nothing to shake their firm determination to cleave unto the LORD.

And truly those early converts had much to endure for CHRIST's sake, and must have had many temptations to relapse. Though not as yet exposed to open persecution, they would have to bear the taunts and sneers of their former friends, and endure reproach and ridicule for the Name of CHRIST. The very name of *Christian*, given for the first time in Antioch, was probably a name of scorn and mockery, though the Church soon learned to glory in that Name which had first been used as a by-word and reproach (1 Pet. iv. 16).

(The word *Christian* only occurs three times in the New Testament (ch. xi. 26 ; xxvi. 28 ; 1 Pet. iv. 16). It was first used by unbelievers, as a term of reproach or ridicule. The Church used the terms '*disciples*,' '*saints*,' '*believers*,' '*brethren*,' and it was certainly not given by the Jews, as the use of it would imply that those who bore it were followers of the Messiah—the CHRIST.)

Here, in the Gentile city of Antioch, S. Barnabas sees a fruitful field of labour for him who was waiting quietly at Tarsus for his promised call. He fetches Saul from Tarsus, and for a year the two friends remain at Antioch, building up the Church of CHRIST on exactly the same lines as the Church at Jerusalem, steadfast in the Apostles' doctrine and

fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers, faithfully carrying out the principle on which the planting of the Gospel was conducted, which was to fix it effectually in certain chosen spots, from whence it might extend in ever-widening circles.

3. *The Liberality of the Early Christians* (v. 27-30).

Picture the little company of Christians in that far-off heathen city, utterly regardless of the sneers, the taunts, and the ridicule of their relations and friends; blameless, harmless, without rebuke, meeting early every morning to celebrate the holy Eucharist, and sing God's praises, shining as lights in the surrounding gloom, leading a life of strict self-denial, fasting, and prayer (ch. xiii. 2), which must have contrasted strangely with the luxury, self-indulgence, and wickedness around. Their love to God showed itself in their charity and liberality towards others; for when Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem (mentioned also ch. xxi. 10, 11), foretold that a great famine was at hand, they immediately collected alms for the Church in Judæa, and sent it to the elders at Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. And this collection was not the gift of a few among the rich, but '*every man according to his ability*' contributed, recognising it as the duty and the privilege of every Christian to give alms as he is able.

(The Church in Judæa was much impoverished at this time, for persecution had driven away great numbers of Christians, and those who remained were probably chiefly the very poor, whose means would not allow them to escape. It was just and right, therefore, that those who had profited from them in spiritual things should now minister to them in temporal things—Rom. xv. 27; 1 Cor. ix. 11.)

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. The name of Christian, once given in scorn and ridicule, is now the noblest title any one can possess. By the grace of God we are Christians. Our Christian name,

given us in Holy Baptism, should remind us of our great privileges ; members of CHRIST—children of GOD—heirs of heaven—and we should often ask, Am I walking worthy of my high vocation ?

2. To follow the example of those first Christians at Antioch, by bearing ridicule bravely—by setting a holy example—by avoiding occasions of sin, and evil companions—and by practising the Christian duties of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

3. To have a firm trust in the overruling Providence of GOD, believing that He will make all things, however seemingly adverse, work together for His greater glory, and the extension of His Kingdom.

LESSON XXII.

S. Peter in Prison.

Read Acts xii. 1-23. Learn Ps. xci. 11, 12; S. Matt. xx. 22, 23; S. John xiv. 13.

1. *The Baptism of Suffering* (v. 1, 2).

The Church's time of rest (see Lesson xviii.) has been succeeded by a season of bitter persecution. A new ruler, Herod Agrippa, grandson of the Herod who massacred the Holy Innocents, and nephew of the murderer of S. John Baptist, has been made king over the whole country. He gained his appointment by flattering the Roman Emperor; and now, being ambitious of popularity, he resolves to please the Jews by turning the sword of persecution against the Christians. '*He killed James the brother of John with the sword*' (v. 2). This is the short record of the martyrdom of the first of the Apostles who shed his blood for Christ. Being one of the three specially favoured Apostles, he would naturally take a leading part in the building up of the Church, and great must have been the joy of the enemies of the Faith at his execution. As to S. James, he rejoiced to drink of his Master's cup, and to be a sharer in His Baptism of suffering. We are told by a very early historian that so impressed was his accuser by the good confession he made before his judges, that he then and there declared himself a believer, and was condemned to die with him. On the way to execution he begged forgiveness of S. James for the wrong he had done him; and the Apostle, having looked at him for a short time, said, '*Peace be with you,*' and kissed him. And so both were beheaded together, probably on

the second day of the Passover—the same day as the Crucifixion of Christ.

(The Acts relate the *life*, not the *death*, of the Apostles. S. Luke does not describe death-beds. He would teach us that the true way to *die* well is to *live* well. His chief object in writing the Acts was to trace the main course of the progress of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, and this will explain why the details of the martyrdom of S. Stephen have been recorded, closely connected as they were with the conversion of S. Paul.)

2. *The World's Weapons* (v. 3-6).

Seeing that the execution of S. James had won for him the goodwill of the Jews, Herod ventures on a further step. He seizes S. Peter, the chief of the Apostles, and hurries him off to prison under a guard of Roman soldiers, intending to deliver him over to the Sanhedrim, after the Passover.

Look into that gloomy dungeon on what is, to all appearance, the last night of S. Peter's earthly pilgrimage. Strong prison walls, heavy doors, iron gates, seem to render escape impossible. No less than four quaternions of soldiers have been told off to guard the prison—that is to say, four parties of four soldiers, each party taking one of the four watches of the night—two in the cell with the prisoner, to each of whom he is chained—one outside the cell door, and one outside the prison door.

Look well at the prisoner; he believes it to be the last night of his life; how is he spending it? '*The same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains*' (v. 6). His conscience is at rest—he smiles in his sleep—perhaps in his dreams he is once more casting his net into the Lake of Galilee, and One standing on the shore says to him, '*Follow Me.*' Or perhaps he hears again the last loving command, '*Feed My lambs—feed My sheep.*' He has tried to do his Master's bidding, and now he is ready to follow Him to prison and to death. Already he hears the loving welcome, '*Well*

done, good and faithful servant : thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord ' (S. Matt. xxv. 21-23).

3. *The Church's Weapons* (v. 7-17).

But the time of rest is not yet. Suddenly—in the dead of night—the dark prison is flooded with unearthly brightness. An Angel smites the Apostle on the side, saying, '*Arise up quickly.*' The chains fall clanking on the stone pavement, but the noise does not disturb the sleeping soldiers. Following the directions of the Angel, S. Peter girds himself, binds on his sandals, wraps his loose outer garment about him, and follows his heavenly guide past the sleeping sentinels, out through each prison-ward, till they come to the great iron gate leading to the city, which opens to them of its own accord, and they go out and pass on through one street, and forthwith the Angel disappears, and S. Peter exclaims in amazement, '*Now I know of a surety, that the LORD hath sent His Angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews*' (v. 11).

In a house in Jerusalem, unknown to Herod, but well known to the holy Angels, a little company are gathered together praying. All through the long night-hours, while Herod feasts in his palace, and S. Peter sleeps in his dungeon, prayer is being made without ceasing that God would spare the great Apostle, and deliver him out of the hand of his enemies. The weapon of *prayer* was mightier than the weapons of Herod ; it reached the Throne of God, and brought a mighty Angel to rescue S. Peter from the grasp of the cruel king. To this house, belonging to Mary the mother of S. Mark and sister of S. Barnabas, the Apostle makes his way. Before the morning dawns, their prayer is interrupted by a loud knocking at the door. A damsel named Rhoda answers it. But when she hears S. Peter's well-known voice, the little servant-maid opens not the gate for gladness, but hastens back to tell the joyful news

Believing the tidings too good to be true, they exclaim, '*It is his Angel*' (v. 15), for the early Christians believed unhesitatingly in the teaching of Holy Scripture, that every believer has a Guardian Angel to whose special care he has been entrusted (S. Matt. xviii. 10; Ps. xxxiv. 7; xci. 11, 12; Heb. i. 14).

With what awe and astonishment would that little company gather round the Apostle when they had opened the door, and listen to the story of his marvellous deliverance, as he bids them make known to James and to the rest of the brethren, how the LORD had brought him out of prison! That very night S. Peter left Jerusalem for a time, in order not to expose himself needlessly to danger, or tempt Herod to the sin of persecution.

4. *Herod's Punishment* (v. 17-23).

What strangely different scenes the holy Angels look down upon in this world of ours; and how various are the ministries in which they are employed! King Herod, angry at the escape of S. Peter, vented his rage upon the gaolers, and, having examined them, commanded that they should be put to death. He then left Jerusalem for Cæsarea, where he commanded a grand festival to be held in honour of the Emperor. Here, in the midst of a great throng of people, King Herod sat upon his throne, his royal robes of wrought silver glistening in the sun. A deputation from Tyre and Sidon waited on him, hoping to appease his anger against their people, and to obtain from him conditions favourable to their commercial transactions. King Herod made an oration in reply, and the audience, dazzled and awestruck at his magnificence, and desiring to propitiate so great a monarch, gave a shout, saying, '*It is the voice of a god, and not of a man*' (v. 22). Herod accepted this impious flattery, '*he gave not God the glory,*' and his punishment followed swiftly. One of God's holy Angels smote him with a *horrible disease*, and, after five days of torment, the proud persecutor was summoned to the Judgment-seat of God.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. To exercise a calm trust and confidence in God when persecuted for righteousness' sake. 'He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness, for by strength shall no man prevail' (1 Sam. ii. 9).

2. The gates of hell shall never prevail against the Church of God. Though the powers of this world may array themselves against the Church, and appear at first to be successful, yet in the end she must prevail, and the rage of her enemies will but bring about her triumph and their own destruction. (Compare with this chapter the victory of Hezekiah over Sennacherib in answer to his prayer, 2 Kings xix. 1, 14; Isa. xxxvii. 1.)

3. To try always to remember the presence of the holy Angels, to derive comfort from the thought of their guardianship, and never to grieve them by our sins (Exod. xxiii. 20, 21). The holy Angels ever stand in the presence of God, adoring and worshipping Him; but they are also ministering spirits, employed by Him in carrying out His work in this world, sometimes as messengers of wrath, and sometimes as messengers of mercy (2 Sam. xxiv. 16; 2 Kings xix. 35; Gen. xix. 15; xxi. 17; Dan. vi. 22, &c.)

4. The power of prayer. All things are possible with God, and He has repeatedly promised to hear and answer all prayer, if it is offered in the way that He points out—in the *Name of CHRIST* (S. John xiv. 13; xvi. 23, 24)—with *faith* (S. Mark xi. 24; S. James i. 5, 6)—with *submission to the will of God* (S. Luke xxii. 42)—with *humility* (S. James iv. 6; 1 Pet. v. 5, 6)—and with *perseverance* (S. Luke xi. 5-14; xviii. 1). God often tries our faith and confidence in Him by not granting our petitions at once, but He will certainly hear and answer all our prayers as is best for us, if we only persevere (Eph. vi. 18).

NOTES.—(a) The message to *S. James* (ch. xii. 17) intimates that he held a special position in the Church at Jerusalem. From other passages in Scripture (Acts ix. 27; xxi. 18.

Gal. ii. 12) it would appear that this James, '*the LORD's brother,*' and first Bishop of Jerusalem, was the Apostle James the Less, the son of Cleopas or Alphæus. He was probably appointed Bishop of Jerusalem on account of his relationship to our Blessed LORD.

(b) We are not told where S. Peter went after his deliverance from prison. Probably this persecution drove the Twelve from Jerusalem, and thus accomplished the purpose of God in the wider spread of the Gospel. When the contributions of the Church at Antioch were brought to Jerusalem by Paul and Barnabas, they were given to the *elders*, which looks as if the Apostles were absent (ch. xi. 28-30).

LESSON XXIII.

The First Mission to the Gentiles.

Read Acts xiii. 1-12. Learn S. Luke xi. 21, 22 ; Ephes. vi. 10-13.

1. Called to be Apostles (v. 1-3).

The wrath of Herod did not hinder the progress of the Church. '*The word of God grew and multiplied*' (ch. xii. 24). Barnabas and Saul, having fulfilled their ministry at Jerusalem, returned to Antioch, taking with them Mark, nephew of S. Barnabas. It was a season of special fasting and prayer in the Church at Antioch, and many '*prophets*' and '*teachers*' were engaged in building up the Church of God in that city. While they fasted and prayed, the Holy Ghost made choice of two among their number to be ordained the first Apostles and Bishops of the Gentile world.

'*Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*' (v. 2). Hitherto they had belonged to the order of Prophets and Teachers ; now they were to be ordained through the laying-on of hands (v. 3) to the office and work of Apostles (Rom. i. 1). And although S. Paul had already received visions and revelations of the LORD, the inward spiritual gifts of the Holy Ghost necessary to qualify him for the work of an Apostle were to be given to him as to others, through the Sacrament of Ordination (see Office for the Consecration of Bishops).

What a solemn, impressive sight must that first consecra

tion of bishops have been in the infant Church of Antioch, probably performed by S. Peter, who, according to tradition, had sought refuge in Antioch after his deliverance from prison ! ‘ *When they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away* ’ (v. 3).

The first great missionary journey was pointed out by the Holy Spirit ; there was no uncertainty as to the destination of the newly-ordained Apostles. ‘ *Being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, they departed unto Seleucia ; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus* ’ (v. 4). Three humble Jews, sailing down the river to the port of Seleucia, unnoticed and unknown, except among a few despised Christians in Antioch ; yet these three men were the pioneers of the great army which for eighteen hundred years has been engaged in conquering the strongholds of Satan, and extending the dominions of CHRIST.

2. *The Power of Satan* (v. 4-8).

Picture the three missionaries standing on the sea coast of Seleucia, waiting for a sailing vessel to carry them to the island of Cyprus, whose high mountains are visible on the horizon. How S. Barnabas rejoices in the thought that he has been chosen to carry the message of the Gospel to his fellow-countrymen ; how plainly S. Paul now sees the meaning of that voice in the Temple, ‘ *Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles* ’ (ch. xxii. 21) !

Arrived at Salamis, the nearest port to Seleucia, they lost no time in preaching to the Jews in their synagogues, and from Salamis they went through the island, probably on foot, to Paphos, the capital of Cyprus, and the residence of the Roman Governor.

A more unlikely soil for the reception of the Gospel it would have been difficult to find. The island of Cyprus, like the city of Antioch, was a meeting-place of the Eastern and Western world, and combined the evils of both. Yet *here at Paphos*, perhaps the most heathen of all heathen cities, the Cross was to triumph. Sergius Paulus, the Roman

Deputy or Governor, was a man of an inquiring mind. The heathen religion in which he had been brought up could not satisfy him ; he saw through its hollowness, and was anxiously seeking after truth.

There was a Jew in the island, a sorcerer and false prophet, who, like Simon Magus (ch. viii. 9), had been allowed a certain magical power, and had gained by his arts a considerable influence over the Governor.

Sergius Paulus, hearing that two Rabbis of the same race were visiting the island, sent for them, and desired to hear the word of God. Elymas, the sorcerer, fearing his power will come to end, and jealous of the new comers, dares to oppose them, and tries to turn away the Governor from the faith.

3. *The Power of God* (v. 9-12).

We can picture the scene. The two Apostles, like Moses and Aaron of old, confronted with Satan in the person of this sorcerer. He will not loose his hold on the heathen world without a struggle. But the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church of CHRIST. S. Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, gazes sternly at the sorcerer, calling him the '*child of the devil*,' the '*enemy of all righteousness*'; and in punishment for his leading astray those who were desirous to know the ways of the LORD, he calls down upon him the judgment of God, and strikes him with blindness. When S. Paul ceased speaking, '*there fell on him a mist and a darkness*,' and the blind magician was obliged to grope about, seeking some one to lead him by the hand.

Then, turning to the astonished Governor, S. Paul preached to him the glad tidings of salvation, and the Roman nobleman was numbered among the LORD's disciples.

We are not told whether Elymas afterwards repented and was restored to sight ; his punishment was '*for a season*,' that he might be led to repent, and that his temporary blindness, as had been the case with S. Paul himself, might be the means of bringing eternal light to his soul.

Henceforth the Hebrew name Saul is dropped, and the Apostle of the Gentiles is known by the Roman name of Paul, perhaps to denote his special call to the conversion of the Gentiles. Some suppose that he had borne both names from his childhood, others that a new name was given to him as to S. Peter and others, at a particular crisis of their history.

From this time it is S. Paul who takes the lead. Instead of '*Barnabas and Saul*,' it is '*Paul and his company*' (v. 13), or '*Paul and Barnabas*' (v. 43, 46, 50; xv. 2, 22, 35). The three exceptions to this (xiv. 14; xv. 12, 25) are easily accounted for.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. The warfare between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness is still going on, and each one of us must take part in it. Those who are not actively engaged in fighting against sin, the world, and the devil, are really fighting against CHRIST, for He has said, '*He that is not with Me is against Me*' (S. Matt. xiii. 30).

2. Satan often tempts us through others, as he tempted Sergius Paulus through Elymas. If we yield to these bad companions, we are giving Satan the victory. But CHRIST also has His agents—those who work for Him, and try to draw us to what is right. If we yield to their influence, Satan is conquered.

3. The danger of hardening our hearts against the truth, lest, like Elymas, we should be struck with blindness, and so lose the light of JESUS CHRIST the Sun of righteousness.

4. To submit ourselves in all things to the will of GOD, though we may not understand it at the time. The meaning of the vision in the Temple was not made clear to S. Paul until he received the further call at Antioch to become the Apostle of the Gentiles.

LESSON XXIV.

Two Sabbath Days in Antioch.

Read Acts xiii. 13-52. Learn Ps. xcv. 8 ; 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

1. *Disappointment and Desertion* (v. 13).

What a promising commencement had this first missionary enterprise ! The Governor of Cyprus won over to the faith—the Cross victorious ! But the sowers of the good seed must not stop on their mission ; one must plant, another must water. The three missionaries set sail from Cyprus across the sea to Perga, the capital of Pamphylia, in Asia Minor. They probably left Cyprus in the spring, and, if so, they would find the streets of Perga silent and deserted ; for almost the whole population of this sultry coast move up into the mountains during the summer. A difficult journey lies before them ; they have to cross the snow-capped mountains of Taurus to reach the city of Antioch in Pisidia, a hundred miles distant.

This city was not Antioch in Syria, from whence they had started, but a Roman colony or military station on the high road from Ephesus and Smyrna eastward.

The mountainous district which they had now to traverse was a wild, bare region of cliffs, full of deep ravines, down which the melting snow rushes in foaming torrents ; and the missionaries would have to encounter '*perils of waters*' and also '*perils of robbers*,' for the whole region was infested with wild marauding tribes (2 Cor. xi. 26).

It was at this point of their journey—why we know not

—that they were forsaken by John Mark, who, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. There is no reason given for his departure, either here or elsewhere ; but it is clear that S. Paul considered it to be a looking back after putting his hand to the plough (xv. 38). The failings and shortcomings of the saints of GOD are recorded for our warning and instruction. Whether S. Mark at this time shrank from the toils and dangers of a missionary's life, or whether his Jewish scruples were offended by the free admission of Gentiles to the Church, we cannot tell ; but we know that in after-years he became a great saint, and was gladly welcomed by S. Paul as a fellow-labourer (2 Tim. iv. 11 ; Phil. 24 ; Col. iv. 10).

2. *S. Paul's Sermon* (v. 14-39).

The perilous journey accomplished in safety, Paul and Barnabas enter the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and join in the service.

Synagogues are said to have been established by Ezra after the Captivity ; they were places of worship for the Jews who, living at a distance from Jerusalem, were unable to take part in the Temple services. They generally stood on a high ground in or near the town, and were so built that one end was towards Jerusalem. In this more sacred portion of the edifice was placed the Ark or Chest containing the Books of the Law, and also the '*chief seats*' so eagerly sought after by the scribes and Pharisees (S. Matt. xxiii. 6 ; S. Jas. ii. 2, 3). The service consisted of prayers read by the '*ruler*,' the people standing, and responding '*Amen*' (S. Mark xi. 25 ; S. Luke xviii. 11)—the singing of the Psalms—the reading of the first and second lesson for the day (one from the Law, the other from the Prophets), and also the '*word of exhortation*,' or sermon (v. 15).

Every Jew, on entering a synagogue, put on the '*Tallith*,' or veil worn over the head. No doubt the two missionaries conformed to this custom ; and the ruler of the synagogue, seeing the two stranger Jews sitting at the lower end of the

synagogue, and hoping, perhaps, that they had lately come from the Holy City, sent to them, inviting them to speak to the people.

Here indeed was an opportunity at which S. Paul must have rejoiced. Though called to be the Apostle of the Gentiles, yet he himself was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, consumed with a burning, passionate zeal for the salvation of his '*brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh*' (Rom. ix. 3-5; x. 1). The chosen people had rejected his testimony in Jerusalem; they had persecuted and slain the followers of the crucified and risen Messiah; yet he clings to the hope that here in this far-off city they may receive the message of salvation gladly.

He secures the attention of the audience by dwelling on God's mercies to His chosen people, how He bare them and carried them as a nursing father in the wilderness—(see marg. reading, Deut. i. 31)—gave them the land of Canaan in possession—sent them judges and prophets, and raised up David to be their king.

He then points out that God has fulfilled His promise to David by raising up unto Israel of his seed a Saviour, Jesus, and that they who dwelt at Jerusalem and their rulers, because they knew Him not, rejected and crucified Him, though in so doing they were but fulfilling all that the prophets had spoken of the Messiah.

Yet being very God it was not possible that His flesh should see corruption. This very same Jesus, who was laid in the sepulchre, was now their risen and glorified Saviour, through whom they might obtain forgiveness of all their sins, and be justified or acquitted before God (v. 16-39).

3. *Rejected and Persecuted* (v. 40-52).

Very various were the feelings set in motion by S. Paul's eloquent appeal. As he looks round the assembly and sees the various expressions of their faces, he closes his sermon with a solemn warning to those who, by long continuance in *sin*, should so harden their hearts as to become incredulous

and proof against all warnings (v. 41 ; Hab. i. 5). His discourse had made a profound impression. The congregation broke up to carry to their homes the report of this strange sermon. Jews, proselytes, and Gentiles crowded round the missionaries, entreating that they might hear the same words on the following Sabbath. During the week the Apostles laboured diligently to deepen the impression that had been made, and on the following Sabbath the synagogue was filled, not only with Jews and proselytes, but also with Gentiles, who crowded together to hear the word of God.

The Jews were bitterly offended. Filled with envy at the thought of these uncircumcised Gentiles claiming a share in Israel's Messiah, they began contradicting and blaspheming, and drew upon themselves the stern reproof of the Apostles. '*Seeing ye judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles*' (v. 46). As CHRIST came first unto His own, so did His messengers declare first the glad tidings of salvation unto the Jews; but when they rejected the word, it was proclaimed to all who would receive it (S. Matt. xxii. 8, 9 ; Is. xlix. 6). Joyfully did the Gentiles receive the message of salvation; they yielded themselves to the grace of God, and the word of the LORD was published throughout all that region.

The faith of the new converts was soon tried by persecution. The Jews stirred up the heathen magistrates and those in high position at Antioch, and expelled the missionaries from their coasts. But while men reviled and persecuted them, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer ; and, shaking off the dust of their feet as they left the city, the Apostles turned towards the south-east, and took the road across the grassy plains leading to Iconium.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. '*Take heed how ye hear.*' If we resist God's grace, and *harden our hearts* against His offers of mercy, our privileges

and opportunities will be taken away, and given to those who will make a better use of them.

2. It is God's will that all should be saved and should come to the knowledge of the truth. He *wills* not, He desires not the death of the sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live; but at the same time He does not force man to accept His offers ; we must each one exercise our own free-will, and choose either good or evil.

3. Never to think ourselves wiser or better than others, or cling in a narrow, selfish spirit to our own prejudices or opinions.

LESSON XXV.

Perils in the City—Perils by the Heathen.

Read Acts xiv. Learn Ps. cxxvi. 6, 7; Rom. viii. 18.

1. *Iconium* (v. 1-7).

At Iconium, the two Apostles pursued the same plan as at Antioch. They went repeatedly to the synagogue, proclaiming to their fellow-countrymen the message of salvation. At first they were well received. Multitudes of Jews and proselytes believed, and many signs and wonders were done; miracles of healing on the bodies as well as the souls of those who had faith to believe. But the enemy of souls soon succeeded in raising up a bitter persecution against the two Apostles. Perhaps, though the miracles themselves could not be denied, they were attributed to the power of magic or of evil spirits; the city was divided (comp. S. John vii. 12, 43; x. 19; S. Luke xii. 51), and the Apostles, to avoid being stoned, were compelled to seek refuge among the half-civilised people of the hill-country of Lycaonia (S. Matt. x. 23).

2. *The Healing of the Cripple at Lystra* (v. 8-18).

The little town of Lystra, which was the first to receive the two missionaries after their flight from Iconium, contained no synagogue. Its inhabitants were heathen—worshippers of Jupiter, whose temple stood at the gate of their city (v. 13); *it in this remote corner one half-Jewish family had settled,*

who must gladly have welcomed their two fellow-countrymen. The Jewess Eunice, married to a Greek, was living there with her mother Lois and her son Timothy (ch. xvi. 1; xx. 4; 2 Tim. i. 5). The careful education she gave her son in the Holy Scriptures from his childhood (2 Tim. iii. 15) marks her out as a devout and holy woman, intent on shielding her son to the utmost of her power from the corrupting influences of the heathen around. How joyfully must such a family have shown hospitality to the persecuted missionaries!

And here, among these rude tribes, as in the more civilised cities, the power of the LORD was present to heal the bodies and souls of men. '*There sat a certain man at Lystra*' (v. 8), a cripple from his birth, probably brought by his friends to a much-frequented place to ask alms of the passers-by. In this place of public resort the Apostles proclaimed their message, and one day, while thus engaged, the earnest attention of the poor helpless cripple attracted the notice of S. Paul.

Perceiving that he had faith to be healed, he fixes his earnest gaze upon him, bidding him in a loud voice '*Stand upright on thy feet*' (v. 10). Instantly the hitherto helpless cripple springs to his feet, leaping and walking, and doubtless praising God for his marvellous cure.

Full of wonder and admiration at so unexpected a miracle, the ignorant people could only imagine that their gods had visited them in the likeness of men, and, anxious to show them all honour, they at once prepared to offer sacrifice to them. Great was the commotion in the city. A procession of white-robed priests with knives in their hands, leading oxen gaily adorned with garlands for sacrifice, stopped before the door of the house—probably the house of Timothy—to which the Apostles had retired after the miracle. Horror-struck and indignant at so great a sacrilege, the two Apostles rush into the midst of the excited crowd, rending their garments, showing thus, by signs as well as by words, their grief and

dismay. Having succeeded in obtaining a hearing, S. Paul earnestly impresses upon the mistaken crowd that they are but men of like passions with themselves—messengers sent by God to bid them turn away from dumb idols to serve the living God—that God who made the natural world witness to His love, wisdom, and power, giving the rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling men's hearts with food and gladness. Yet so hard were they to persuade, that even then they could scarcely be restrained from offering sacrifice to their benefactors.

3. '*Once was I stoned*' (v. 19-28).

A few days later, and an excited crowd once more gathers in the streets of Lystra. They drag the bruised, senseless body of a man out of the gates of the city, and leave him there apparently lifeless. The object of their blind fury is none other than S. Paul—he whom a few days before they were ready to worship as a god. Why this sudden change of popular feeling? Jews from Antioch and Iconium have followed the Apostles to Lystra, contradicting and blaspheming—probably ascribing their miracles to the powers of darkness, and stirring up hatred and persecution. '*Once was I stoned*' (2 Cor. xi. 25): yet not so was S. Paul to obtain his crown of martyrdom. When the crowd dispersed, a little band of disciples, among whom were doubtless Lois, Eunice, and Timothy, gathered round the apparently lifeless body of their beloved teacher to give it reverent burial, when, to the astonishment and joy of all, the Apostle rises to his feet unhurt, and, after being sheltered for the night, doubtless by the faithful Eunice, he departs with Barnabas the following day to Derbe, probably on foot, a journey of some hours.

Here again they made many disciples, among whom we may reckon '*Gaius of Derbe*' (ch. xx. 4), one of the future companions of S. Paul.

They were now not far from the mountain passes which led down into Cilicia, and to S. Paul's native city of Tarsus. It would have been easy to return to Antioch by that route. But anxiety to strengthen the faith of the new converts led them to retrace their steps, and visit, one after another, the very cities whence they had been driven by persecution, strengthening the faith of the disciples—exhorting them to suffer courageously—reminding them that we must '*through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*'; and solemnly ordaining priests in every Church which they had planted, that the Sacraments might be duly administered, and the people further instructed in the faith.

It is probable that this first mission lasted three or four years, and as the district traversed was comparatively small, a considerable time was probably spent by the Apostles at each city chosen as a centre. The abundant fruit of their labours is clearly seen in the need that arose immediately for the ordination of '*elders*,' or presbyters, to carry on the work which had been begun.

The language of S. Paul (ch. xv. 36) also shows that he felt a good foundation had been laid in the different places they had visited.

Returning by sea from Attalia to Antioch in Syria, whence they had started, and which was the head-quarters of the Gentile Church, they gathered all the disciples together, relating the wonders God had wrought for them and by them, praising and giving Him thanks for that He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be ours hereafter, if we are only brave and faithful in fulfilling the work God has given us to do.

2. To disclaim any honour or credit which others may

be willing to offer us. We are but instruments in the hand of God ; all success is due to Him ; of ourselves we are nothing, and can do nothing.

3. To be always trying to extend God's kingdom at home and abroad, and do all in our power, by our prayers and our alms, to co-operate with those who have devoted their lives to the conversion of the heathen.

LESSON XXVI.

The First Council of the Christian Church.

Read Acts xv. 1-35. Learn S. John xvi. 13 ; S. Matt. xviii. 17.

1. A Difficult Question (v. 1-3).

The peace and harmony of the Church at Antioch was not left long undisturbed. Certain men came down from Judæa, and began to teach the brethren that, unless they were circumcised after the manner of Moses, they could not be saved.

Who were these men? They had not been sent by the Apostles at Jerusalem, for they soon after speak of them as '*men to whom we gave no such commandment*' (v. 24). S. Paul calls them '*false brethren*' (Gal. ii. 4), and S. Luke tells us they were of the '*sect of the Pharisees*' (v. 5), men who could not cast aside the prejudices in which they had been educated. They still clung to the idea that Jerusalem was to be the earthly centre of the Church of God, and that the Gentiles could only be saved by becoming incorporated through circumcision with the true Israel of God, and conforming to the laws of God's ancient people. The fierce and bitter controversy between these Judaising Christians and the Gentiles, begun at Antioch, lasted until the downfall of Jerusalem. In S. Paul's Epistles we find constant allusions to the bitter hatred of this faction towards himself. They tried to undermine his influence and discredit his teaching, throwing doubts on his apostolic authority.

(1 Cor. iv. 1-4; ix. 1-6.; 2 Cor. iii. 1; vi. 3-12; xi. 5, 22, 23; xii. 11, 12; Gal. i. 11, 12, 18-20; ii. 6-9), making contemptuous remarks upon his personal appearance (1 Cor. ii. 1-5; 2 Cor. x. 10; xi. 6; Gal. iv. 13-17), imputing dishonourable motives to him (2 Cor. ii. 17; iv. 2; xii. 14-18), marring the effect of his teaching by insisting on the necessity of circumcision, and thus virtually preaching another Gospel (Gal. i. 6-9; iii. 1-3; v. 1-7; vi. 12-15). Probably those at Corinth who called themselves the party 'of Cephas' (1 Cor. i. 12) belonged to this faction—not that there was really the slightest difference of opinion among the Apostles themselves; but these troublers of the peace of the Church chose to call themselves by the name of him whom they looked upon as the Apostle of the circumcision.

The '*dissension and disputation*' which these new teachers stirred up, caused much perplexity in the Church at Antioch, and a '*revelation*' (Gal. ii. 2), vouchsafed to S. Paul, determined them to lay the matter before the Apostles and Elders (or Presbyters) at Jerusalem. So a deputation, headed by Paul and Barnabas, was appointed, and '*being brought on their way by the Church,*' they travelled along the coast road through Phœnicia and Samaria, making known as they went along, to the various Christian congregations they passed, the glad tidings of the extension of the Church in Asia Minor, and the bringing in of the Gentiles to the fold of CHRIST.

2. *The Question Discussed* (v. 4-11).

The whole Church at Jerusalem assembled to receive the deputation from Antioch, and to welcome the Apostles of the Gentiles. This visit is probably the same of which S. Paul speaks (Gal. ii. 1-9). The public reception of Paul and Barnabas by the Church at Jerusalem appears to have been followed by a private conference between S. Paul and the three chief Apostles, who fully recognised his apostolic authority, and called together a Synod or Council of the whole Church to *consider the difficult question which had been laid before them to decide.*

How deeply interesting was that first Synod of the

Christian Church! Three Apostles, besides S. Paul and S. Barnabas, we know were present at it, as well as many prophets and elders, such as Judas, and Silas, and Titus whom S. Paul had brought with him from Antioch. There was much '*disputing*' or questioning, for the Judaizing party would naturally find their warmest supporters in Jerusalem.

When the subject had been fully discussed, S. Peter rose to speak (v. 7). He reminded the assembly how, ten years before, GOD Himself had decided this question, by accepting the Gentile Cornelius and his household, bestowing upon uncircumcised Gentiles the same gifts of the Holy Ghost as to those who were circumcised. They must not then regard as unclean those whose hearts GOD had purified by faith. And if they were to require from the Gentiles a fulfilment of that law, which neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear, it would be a tempting of GOD, a distrust of His guidance, an act of disobedience to His revealed will. Neither the ceremonial law, nor the traditions of the elders were necessary to salvation; the free grace of CHRIST alone was able to save both Jew and Gentile.

3. *The Question Decided* (v. 12-21).

Then, amid general silence, S. Paul and S. Barnabas gave an account of their mission, relating the wonders and miracles GOD had wrought among the Gentiles by their means, thus giving abundant proof of His divine approval.

When they sat down, S. James, surnamed '*the Just*,' Bishop of Jerusalem, and President of the Council, addressed the assembly. Every one present must have felt how much depended upon his words. Held in highest honour by the Christians as the near kinsman of the LORD, he was so zealous for the law, and led so holy and ascetic a life that even unconverted Jews looked up to him with reverence.

Tradition represents him as a Nazarite, clothed in fine white linen from head to foot, and wearing on his forehead

golden mitre, similar to that worn by the Jewish High-Priest. He lived a life of prayer, spending long hours in the Temple, till his knees became hard as those of a camel.

His opinion was certain to be adopted by the multitude, and even the most uncompromising Pharisee could hardly refuse to accept the judgment of one so loyal to Jewish traditions. Great was probably the astonishment of the Judaizing party to hear him whom they looked upon as their leader declaring his entire agreement with all that S. Peter had put forward, and showing how the prophecies of old found their true fulfilment in the conversion of the Gentiles (Amos ix. 11, 12). For this reason, the Gentiles ought not to be troubled with any Jewish obligations, except such as were plainly essential, as safeguards against idolatry, and for the promoting of peace and unity between the Jewish and Gentile sections of the Church.

4. *The Apostolic Decree* (v. 22-35).

The debate was at an end, for all the leaders had spoken. The objectors had been silenced, the voice of the chief Elder had declared the solemn decision of the Church (v. 19). Immediate steps were taken to make known this decision.

The Decree, which was framed in accordance with the sentence of S. James, was the voice of the whole Church—Apostles, Elders, and brethren—under the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost (v. 28). It was addressed to the Gentile brethren of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, earnestly commending to them their beloved '*Barnabas and Paul*' (v. 25), utterly condemning those who had troubled them and '*subverted their souls*' (v. 24), and decreeing that no Jewish obligation need bind them, except these four necessary things: they were to abstain from meats offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from fornication—that is, they were to keep apart from idol-temples and feasts, and all the wickedness that was carried on there, and they must also give up certain *kinds of food*, otherwise brotherly intercourse would be *impossible with Jewish Christians*, who still considered *themselves bound by the strict letter of the Law of Moses*.

'Blood' was forbidden to the Jews by the Levitical Law (Lev. iii. 17 ; xvii. 10-14), and '*things strangled*' were not used as food by the Jews, because the blood was still in them. By '*meats offered to idols*' is meant the flesh of animals offered in sacrifice, a portion of which was eaten at sacrificial feasts, and other parts were sold in the market. Abstinence from such food was enjoined, because the partaking of it was regarded as in a sense uniting the eater and the deity to whom it was offered (1 Cor. x. 6-21). It is true that an idol was nothing (1 Cor. viii. 4), and there could be no union with a god that had no existence ; true also that all kinds of meat were God's gift (1 Cor. x. 25, 26 ; 1 Tim. iv. 4) ; but, considering the popular belief, it was necessary to abstain from the appearance of evil (1 Cor. viii. 9-11 ; x. 28 ; Rom. xiv. 14).

Great was the joy of the Christians at Antioch when the Decree was made known to them. Two men gifted with prophecy, Judas and Silas, returned with the deputation, and continued for some time at Antioch with Barnabas and Paul, '*teaching and preaching the word of the LORD*' (v. 35).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. We are bound to obey the Church, for she is the living Voice of the Holy Ghost, who speaks through her, and guides her into all truth (S. John xvi. 13). Our Blessed LORD tells us that to obey the Church is the same thing as to obey Himself, and that to disobey the Church is to be guilty of grievous sin (S. Luke x. 16 ; S. John xiii. 20 ; S. Matt. xviii. 17).

2. The duty of fasting and abstinence is very plainly set before us in the Holy Scriptures. The first command given to Adam and Eve in Paradise was one of *abstinence* (Gen. ii. 17). Noah also received a command of abstinence (Gen. ix. 6). The Israelites were commanded to abstain from using certain animals for food (Lev. xi. 8, 11, 43). And the first command which the Church put forth to her Gentile

converts was one of *abstinence*. The days of fasting and abstinence appointed by the Church are the forty days of Lent, certain Vigils, the Ember days, the Rogation days, and all Fridays in the year. We should observe such days and seasons by some kind of self-denial, not only in regard to food, but we may also cut off some pleasures and enjoyments lawful at other times. All such practices should spring from the inner spirit of self-discipline, which should lead us to put a check, not only on our appetites, but on our senses, our passions, our thoughts, words, and actions.

LESSON XXVII.

Painful Scenes in Antioch.

Read Acts xv. 36-41. Learn Prov. xvii. 14 ; 2 Cor. iv. 7.

1. *Fear of Man* (Gal. ii. 11-14).

For some time nothing disturbed the peace and harmony of the Church at Antioch. Jewish and Gentile converts mixed freely together, the Gentiles respecting and observing the customs of their Jewish brethren with regard to food, the Jews freely acknowledging the liberty of the Gentiles as regarded circumcision. All were beginning to feel that in the Christian Church there was '*neither Greek nor Jew, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision,*' but all were '*one in CHRIST JESUS*' (Gal. iii. 28 ; Col. iii. 11).

S. Peter appears to have come to Antioch some time after the Council at Jerusalem. Whether or not he was Bishop of Antioch at this time is uncertain, but he had great influence in the city. At first he lived on friendly terms with the Gentile converts (Gal. ii. 12), but after a time some visitors arrived from Jerusalem, who, though Christians, were zealous for the law, retaining their old Jewish prejudices, and consequently holding aloof from their Gentile brethren.

A false shame, a fear of giving these men offence, led S. Peter into an act of dissimulation and hypocrisy. Without a word of explanation, he suddenly withdrew from the society of the Gentile Christians, and would eat with them no longer. This example was quickly followed by the *stricter Jews*. To the grief and shame of S. Paul, eve

Barnabas, his fellow-worker, who had pleaded with him for the liberty of the Gentiles at Jerusalem, was now carried away by their dissimulation (Gal. ii. 13). Unless some determined stand was made, all the good effected by the decree of the Council would be swept away.

S. Paul does not hesitate. Painful as it must have been to him to blame one who, in age and position, was superior to himself—one who had lived in daily intercourse with CHRIST, he yet boldly rebukes S. Peter at some public gathering of the Church, at which both Jews and Gentiles were present, charging him with inconsistency, and censuring his conduct in the strongest terms (Gal. ii. 11-14).

2. *S. Peter's Humility* (2 Pet. iii. 15, 16).

How did S. Peter bear this public reproof, given in what was probably his own episcopal city, by one of far less note than himself in the Church, one who, moreover, had formerly been a fierce persecutor of Christians? Was not he one of the very chiefest Apostles, one of those whom the risen Saviour had admitted to His closest intimacy, and to whom He had committed the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (S. Matt. xvi. 19) and the care of the Church on earth (S. John xxi. 15-17)? Had he not been privileged to open the door of the Church to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, and to the Gentiles at Cæsarea? had he not been twice delivered by an Angel from prison, and had not the sick been healed by his very shadow falling upon them? But S. Peter was far too noble and too humble to feel any anger or bitterness against one who had '*withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed*' (Gal. ii. 11). Doubtless he regretted his error and repented of it directly he perceived it, and a careful comparison of a passage in his First Epistle, with a passage in S. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, will show how completely the two Apostles afterwards agreed on the question of Christian Liberty (comp. 1 Pet. ii. 16 with Gal. v. 13). In his Second Epistle, S. Peter speaks of the great Apostle of the Gentiles *in terms of honour and affection as 'our beloved brother*

Paul, and bears testimony to his wisdom, and to the divine inspiration under which he wrote (2 Pet. iii. 15, 16).

In their old age, when they had fought the good fight, and finished their course, the two great Apostles met for the last time on earth in Rome, the capital of the world, there, perhaps, on the same day, but certainly during the same persecution under Nero, to win the crown of martyrdom, and enter together into the joy of their LORD.

3. *Separation* (Acts xv. 36-41).

No sooner was tranquillity restored to the Church in Antioch, than S. Paul proposed to S. Barnabas to accompany him on a visitation tour to revisit the brethren in every city where they had preached the word of the LORD, and confirm them in the Faith. S. Barnabas readily agreed to the proposal, but wished to take with them his cousin John Mark, who was very anxious to be allowed a second trial. To this S. Paul objected. He had deserted them on their former tour. He had suddenly returned home, leaving them to face the difficulties and dangers of the journey, and S. Paul was naturally unwilling to risk the serious hindrance to the success of a great and sacred work which would arise were he to abandon them a second time. The generous character of S. Barnabas, the '*son of consolation*,' made him, on the other hand, anxious to give his nephew another chance. Neither would give way. A quarrel arose between these two faithful servants of God, '*and the contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from the other*' (xv. 39). S. Barnabas, with S. Mark as his companion, sailed away from Antioch to visit the churches of his native Cyprus, while S. Paul chose as his companion for his second great missionary tour, Silas, or Silvanus, who is frequently mentioned in the Acts and in the Epistles (2 Cor. i. 19; 1 Thess. i. 1; 1 Pet. v. 12).

Even Apostles were not exempt from human infirmities, yet the strength of God was made perfect in their weakness (2 Cor. iv. 7; xii. 9). This temporary estrangement was

overruled for good, and two spheres of mission work opened out instead of one. The quarrel was not a lasting one. Six years afterwards S. Paul speaks of S. Barnabas in terms of honour and affection (1 Cor. ix. 6), while S. Mark became eventually a beloved fellow-labourer (Col. iv. 10; Philem. 24), sent for by the great Apostle to Rome, to be his companion and friend during his last imprisonment (2 Tim. iv. 11).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. God's chiefest Saints were men of like passions as we are, subject to human infirmity, liable to err. Yet God, in His love and mercy, overruled even their mistakes and shortcomings to His greater glory, and their own sanctification. We need not be perplexed and disturbed because good and holy men differ on many points; misunderstandings and dissensions may from time to time arise, causing much suffering and temporary estrangement, even between those who really love God and seek to please Him. These mistakes and human infirmities are permitted by God for some wise purpose, and will even be overruled by Him to His greater glory. Here, in the Church Militant, we see in a glass darkly, but hereafter, in the Church Triumphant, all earthly mists will have disappeared, and all will be united together in unbroken peace and charity.

2. Fear of God, not fear of man, must be our ruling principle. We must never sacrifice our principles, or try to disguise what we really believe, or alter our conduct, for fear of giving offence to others, or for the sake of gaining their good opinion.

3. To be neither discouraged nor angry when told of our faults: all such feelings spring from vanity and pride. We should always receive reproof with gratitude and humility, so that our very falls may become the occasion of spiritual victories, and be overruled to the growth of humility, gentleness, patience, and all other Christian graces.

4. *Mutual charity and forbearance, remembering that no two people see things in exactly the same light, but as their different characters incline them.*

LESSON XXVIII.

The Planting of the Church in Galatia.

Read Acts xvi. 1-6 ; Gal. iv. 11-20. Learn Ephes. iv. 14-16 ; S. Jude 3.

1. *The Call of S. Timothy* (v. 1-6).

Amid the prayers and blessings of the Church at Antioch (*'commended by the brethren to the grace of the LORD'*), S. Paul set forth, with Silas his chosen companion, on his second eventful journey. Little did they know when they left Antioch where the guiding hand of CHRIST would lead them. S. Paul's object in this second tour was to revisit the Churches he had founded, and confirm them in the faith. They started along the great Roman road, across the plain of Cilicia, and their route probably lay through Tarsus, S. Paul's old home, and over the Taurus mountains by a narrow defile known in history as the 'Cilician gates.' This narrow gorge eighty miles in length, and in some places not more than ten or twelve paces wide, has often been traversed by invading armies, and its tall frowning cliffs clothed with pine and cedar, presented in after ages so terrible an appearance to the Crusaders, that they named it the 'Gates of Judas.'

This narrow pass led on to the high plain of Derbe and Lystra, and we can imagine the surprise and delight of the Christians in those far off towns, at once more welcoming among them the great missionary who had first taught them the faith of CHRIST.

At Lystra they would receive a warm welcome from the

household of Eunice, and would rejoice to find that the young Timothy, who had been converted to Christianity during S. Paul's former visit, was now called by God to give himself wholly to His service, and to share the future toils and dangers of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. We do not read that Timothy's mother, greatly as she loved him, attempted to put any obstacle in the way. She was probably a widow, and Timothy was her only son, yet she joyfully accepted the sacrifice demanded of her, remembering how great is the reward promised to those who leave all at the call of Him who said '*he that loveth father and mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me*' (S. Matt. x. 37; xix. 29). Henceforth the name of Timothy is ever closely associated with that of the great Apostle. He speaks of him as '*his own son in the faith*' (1 Tim. i. 1, 18; 2 Tim. ii. 2) entirely united to him in heart and soul. He became S. Paul's messenger to the Churches of Macedonia (Acts xix. 22; Phil. ii. 18-20) and Thessalonica (1 Thess. i. 1), Corinth (1 Cor. xvi. 10) and Ephesus (1 Tim. i. 2). He was with him during a great part of his second missionary journey (Acts xvi. 3; xvii. 14.; xviii. 3)—accompanied him on his last visit to Jerusalem (Acts xx. 4)—helped to comfort him in his imprisonment at Rome (Phil. ii. 18-20)—and is urged to hasten from Ephesus to see his beloved master once more before he receives the martyr's crown (2 Tim. iv. 9, 13, 21).

It may appear strange that before ordaining S. Timothy, S. Paul should have circumcised him (v. 3). But the decree of the Council of Jerusalem only related to the exemption of *Gentiles* from circumcision. Timothy, born a Jew on his mother's side, would never have been admitted as a teacher in Jewish Synagogues unless he had been circumcised. What S. Paul had contended for, both at Jerusalem and Antioch, was that circumcision was a thing in itself indifferent, and in things indifferent he would become '*all things to all men*' (1 Cor. ix. 20-23). He therefore circumcised Timothy, a Jew, in condescension to the scruples of weak brethren, while he refused to circumcise Titus, a

Gentile; as by so doing he would have submitted to the requirements of *false* brethren (Gal. ii. 3-5). S. Timothy's circumcision was followed by his ordination. Before the assembled Church he made public profession of his faith (1 Tim. vi. 12), the voice of prophecy promised a blessing on his ministry (1 Tim. i. 18), the '*Gift of God*,' the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit fitting him for the work of the ministry, were given to him, through the laying on of hands (2 Tim. i. 6), and henceforth the son of the widow Eunice became the consecrated companion and sharer of the toils and dangers of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, a fellow-labourer with him in the conversion of the Gentile world.

2. *Sickness and its Results* (Gal. iv. 11-20).

The three Christian Missionaries, on leaving Lystra, traversed the region of Phrygia and Galatia, and as they passed through the various cities they delivered to the Gentile Christians the decree of the Council of Jerusalem, and the Churches were established in the faith, the number of Christians multiplying daily.

It has been thought that S. Paul and his companions had not intended to make any stay in the semi-barbarous regions of Phrygia and Galatia, but to press on to the larger and more civilised cities of Colossæ, Laodicea, and Ephesus. But the Holy Spirit had other designs for them. S. Paul was detained in Galatia by a grievous sickness (Gal. iv. 13), and the way in which he alludes to it, makes it probable that it was some acute pain in the eyes almost blinding him (Gal. iv. 14, 15). If, as is commonly supposed, this continual suffering from weakness of sight was the '*thorn in the flesh*,' which he prayed might be removed, but in which he afterwards learned to rejoice (2 Cor. xii. 7-10), it is very likely that this severe attack was brought on by the hardships to which he was exposed, travelling in all weathers, through the blinding dust and burning heat of the great plains and rugged mountains of Asia.

Instead of preaching the gospel of CHRIST in the large

and wealthy cities of Asia, the great Apostle was thus drawn to evangelise the barbarous tribes of Galatia, perhaps as a lesson to the Church in all ages that savage and barbarous tribes are as dear to our LORD as the inhabitants of wealthy and populous cities. Our blessed LORD, when He was on earth, preferred Galilee of the Gentiles to populous Judea—He preached in villages as well as towns—He sent S. Philip away from Samaria to the lonely desert of Gaza.

Now these Galatians were ignorant heathen, they were not Greeks or Asiatics, but *Gauls* or *Celts*, who had established themselves in this central portion of Asia Minor. Impulsive and enthusiastic, but easily moved either one way or the other, these poor heathen received S. Paul as an angel of God (Gal. iv. 14). Instead of despising his infirmity, they pitied and loved him, and had it been possible would have plucked out their own eyes and have given them to him (Gal. iv. 15). The quick conversion of this fickle race, and their readiness to believe the Gospel, was no doubt due in great measure to the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit which followed their acceptance of the faith (Gal. iii. 5).

3. *O Foolish Galatians* (Gal. iii. 1-3).

How long S. Paul was detained in Galatia we are not told, but before he pursued his journey, he founded several Churches, probably in the different towns of the province.

How sad to think that so fair a beginning did not last. We learn from S. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, that not long after they had cast away their idols, and had begun to '*run well*' (Gal. v. 7), a change came over them. False teachers had followed the Apostle, sowing tares among the wheat, declaring circumcision was necessary to salvation, and thus denying the free grace of God, persuading the Galatians to look upon S. Paul with suspicion as not equal to the other Apostles, accusing him of preaching a different doctrine, disparaging his authority, and perverting the Gospel of *CHRIST*.

S. Paul's Epistle written in consequence of this terrible

falling away, is the severest he ever wrote, and the only one which contains no word of praise or thanksgiving for the faith or zeal of those to whom it is addressed. He begins by vindicating his authority as an Apostle in all respects equal to the other Apostles, having received his authority directly from CHRIST (chs. i. ii). He tells them that the only way of salvation is through faith in CHRIST, and not by trusting in Jewish ordinances (ch. iii. iv. v. vi.), and tries to win them back by reminding them of their former love and kindness to himself (ch. iv. 13-15), and by assurances of his love and affection, and anxiety on their behalf (ch. iv. 19, 20).

(The Epistle to the Galatians was probably written after the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, and before that to the Romans. S. Paul's second visit to Galatia (Acts xviii. 23) was probably made before the Epistle was written. Even then, it appears, from various references to warnings given, that the evil leaven had begun to work (ch. i. 9; iv. 16; v. 21).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. To follow, step by step, the leading of the Holy Spirit, faithfully obeying the motions of His grace within us, content to leave the future in His hands.

‘Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.’

2. God has a work for us to do in sickness as well as in health. Those things which seem to us hindrances, are often found to be special helps in carrying out His work.

3. CHRIST died for all, and therefore all souls are equally precious in His sight. We should never wish to choose our work, but be content to labour as He wills in His vineyard.

4. To contend earnestly, as opportunity offers, for the faith once delivered unto the saints, and to avoid the society of those who would hinder us in running the race set before us.

LESSON XXIX.

The Man of Macedonia

Read Acts xvi. 6-15. Learn S. Matt. ix. 36-38 ; Rom. x. 14, 15.

1. *Come over and help us* (v. 6-10).

From Galatia, S. Paul and his companions journeyed west towards the Egean Sea. Their intention was to '*preach the word in Asia*,' the Roman province so called, comprising the western portion of the peninsula now known as Asia-Minor, which at that time was divided into seven Roman provinces. Being forbidden by the Holy Ghost to visit the wealthy and populous cities of Asia Minor, they next attempted to go northward to Bithynia, but again they were mysteriously hindered by the unseen Hand that was ever guiding them : '*the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not*' (v. 7). How the will of God was made plain to them we are not told. Perhaps through prophecy, or by Divine inspiration, or by a vision.

One course only is left open to them—onward towards the sea—forward to that narrow strait which divides Asia from Europe.

Arrived at the busy port of Troas (v. 8), we can fancy how anxiously the three missionaries would await further guidance. Where would the Spirit of JESUS lead them? *Were they indeed to cross over the sea and proclaim the **spel** of Christ in Europe?*

They were not long left in doubt. In the visions of the night, S. Paul sees a man of Macedonia standing by his side, uttering the urgent entreaty, '*Come over into Macedonia, and help us*' (v. 9).

That loud cry for help was the cry of the heathen world seeking after God—if haply they might find Him. Powerful, wise, and mighty, were those ancient kingdoms of Greece and Rome, yet the world by wisdom could not find out God. The gay, careless pleasure-seekers who thronged the magnificent cities of the old world, found no real satisfaction in their religion, or in their philosophy. They could not solve the strange problem of death, or see beyond the grave; and God loved them, and pitied them, and sent the light of the glorious Gospel of JESUS CHRIST to dispel the darkness of unbelief and heathenism.

2. *The Call obeyed* (v. 11-13).

It is early in the morning, and S. Paul and his companions are already on the beach at Troas, taking their places on board a vessel bound for Europe. There has been no hesitation, no delay. S. Paul has related his vision, and they determine to respond at once, no matter how great the enterprise, or how small, to all appearance, the probability of success. They have '*assuredly gathered*' that the LORD has called them, and they have faith to believe that He will give them grace and power to carry out His work.

Another companion has joined S. Paul at Troas (note the change in the pronoun from the 3rd to the 1st person plural in v. 10), S. Luke, the '*beloved physician*,' the writer of the Acts. Perhaps his companionship was due to the Apostle's recent illness. After accompanying him to Philippi on this occasion, he probably remained there, rejoining S. Paul at the close of his third missionary journey (ch. xx. 5). From that time he appears to have been his constant and faithful companion, sharing his journeys, his dangers, and his shipwrecks, and cheering his imprisonment—first at *Cæsarea*, and then at *Rome* (Col. iv. 14; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. iv. 11).

Of his personal history we know but little. He is supposed to have been a native of Antioch; and, from S. Paul's allusions to him, it is clear that he was a Gentile convert, and uncircumcised (Col. iv. 10, 11, 14).

Full of high hopes, inspired by the consciousness that they were being led by the Spirit of God, S. Paul and his three companions set sail from the port of Troas. A favourable breeze sped them on their course, so that the voyage which, on their return, occupied five days (ch. xx. 6), was now accomplished in two.

The first European city privileged to hear the glad tidings of the Gospel of CHRIST was Philippi, a city of Macedonia, and '*a colony*,' that is to say, a settlement, or military station of Roman citizens and soldiers, planted on the frontiers of the empire for protection, according to Roman usage.

How strange everything must at first have appeared in this European city. Latin spoken instead of Greek, Roman troops and Roman officials, magistrates or *prætors*, attended by their guards or *lictors*—bearing an axe, enclosed in a bundle of rods.

3. *Lydia the Seller of Purple* (vv. 13-15).

In a military town like Philippi, there were but few Jews, and no synagogue, yet S. Paul began, as was his wont, by seeking out first his own countrymen. On the Sabbath-day, he and his companions went out of the city to the Jewish oratory, or '*place of prayer*,' by the river side, and there they sat down and spoke to the few women whom they found quietly worshipping God outside the heathen city.

(These '*places of prayer*' were common where no synagogue existed. They were often mere enclosures, open to the sky, and were generally constructed on the bank of a river on account of the customary ablutions (Ezra viii. 15, 21; Ps. cxxxvii. 1).

Their words were blessed. Among the listeners there sat '*a certain woman*,' Lydia a Gentile convert, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, afterwards one of the Seven Churches of Asia. The luxury and extravagance of that age created a large demand for that purple dye for which Thyatira was famed, and no doubt Lydia's trade was a profitable one among the Roman citizens of Philippi. But on that Sabbath-day, she gained a far greater treasure than earthly riches could procure. As she listened for the first time to the glad tidings of the Gospel '*the LORD opened her heart*' to give heed to the words which were spoken, the arrow of conviction pierced her soul, she accepted the faith, and was baptised with her whole household—her slaves, and her children. Full of gratitude for God's great mercies, she now entreated the missionaries to make her house their home, and they were prevailed upon by her earnestness to accept her hospitality. How greatly honoured was Lydia's house; the little band of converts who soon gathered there (v. 40) were numbered among the most faithful friends of the great Apostle, and formed the first Church in Europe, the grain of corn which should one day yield so great a harvest (Phil. i. 7; iv. 1-3, 15).

How S. Paul loved and honoured the Philippian Church we can see by the Epistle he wrote to them ten years afterwards, during his first imprisonment at Rome. In that Epistle there is not a word of blame, and but few warnings; it abounds in expressions of joy, affection, and gratitude, while reminding them as Christians in a Roman colony that theirs is a higher citizenship than that of Rome (Phil. i. 27; iii. 20).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. Never to choose our own work, or our own way of serving God, but to be always willing to give up our plans and desires, and serve Him in the way that He points out.
2. GOD was guiding S. Paul and his companions every step of their way. It was He who '*suffered them not*' to

go into Asia—who sent the favouring breeze—who spoke in the visions of the night—who opened the heart of Lydia. If only we are true to His inspirations and watchful to obey His voice, He will direct our steps, and enable us to accomplish His will.

3. The cry of the heathen world is ever sounding in the ears of every true Christian, ‘Come over and help us.’ What are we doing in answer to that cry? The harvest is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Cannot we do something more than we have hitherto done—by our prayers, our alms, our influence—to extend Christ’s Kingdom.

LESSON XXX.

The Dungeon and the Earthquake.

Read Acts xvi. 16-34. Learn S. Mark xvi. 16 ; Tit. iii. 5.

1. *The Possessed Slave-girl* (v. 16-23).

There were probably no Jews at Philippi, as in the cities of Asia, to stir up persecution against the messengers of CHRIST. But Satan has many different agents, and this time he makes use of a poor slave-girl to interrupt the work which had been begun so hopefully.

On several occasions, as S. Paul and his companions were on their way to the place of prayer by the river-side, they were followed by a poor slave-girl possessed by the Evil Spirit, who repeated continually, '*These men are servants (or slaves) of the Most High God, which proclaim unto you the way of salvation*' (v. 17). S. Paul, moved with compassion for the poor girl, and desirous to show that he had come to fight against Satan, and will not, therefore, accept his pretended help, suddenly turns, and addressing the Evil Spirit, exclaims, '*I command thee in the name of JESUS CHRIST to come out of her*' (v. 18). The effect was instantaneous. The Evil Spirit was conquered and fled.

This miracle of healing called forth the rage and fury of the slave-masters, who had employed the girl to get money for them by fortune-telling and sooth-saying. With the departure of the Evil Spirit the hope of their gains was gone also, and they therefore determined to revenge themselves on the Christian missionaries.

Paul and Silas were accordingly seized and dragged into the market-place before the magistrates, charged with being Jews, disturbers of the peace of the city, and teachers of unlawful customs (v. 20, 21).

The excited mob, gathered in the market-place, sympathised with the slave-owners; they felt much as the Gadarenes had felt towards One whose healing of a demoniac had interfered with their earthly possessions (S. Matt. viii. 28-34). Greeks and Romans alike held the Jews in abhorrence; it is not surprising, therefore, that without even giving the prisoners the semblance of a trial, they were instantly condemned to be scourged. Their clothes were rudely torn from them by the Roman lictors, who then bound them to the pillar used for that purpose, and beat them unmercifully with their rods. It was the first of three such scourgings which S. Paul endured at the hands of Roman lictors, besides the scourgings inflicted five times by his own countrymen (2 Cor. xi. 24, 25).

II. *The Prison Cell* (v. 23-25).

Nor was this all. Wounded and bleeding from their cruel punishment, they are handed over to the tender mercies of a Roman jailor, who is charged at the same time to keep them safely. Hard and unfeeling was this man's treatment of his prisoners. He even went beyond the orders he had received, by thrusting them into the dark foul recesses of the inner prison, and, to add to their misery, made their feet fast in the stocks (v. 24).

Picture the sufferings of S. Paul and his companion during the quiet hours of the night, lying on the floor of that foul and loathsome dungeon, unable to change their position, their bodies covered with open wounds.

Yet at midnight, strange sounds are heard in that dark cell—sounds which filled the minds of the other prisoners with a feeling of reverence and awe. Those two captives *cannot bend their knees*, or raise their hands in prayer, but *they can lift up their hearts and voices to heaven*. Their

hearts are full of that peace which passeth all understanding, and they are praying and singing praises to God, using no doubt the words of some of those psalms with which they were so familiar, and which were used both by the Jews and early Christians at the stated hours of prayer (Ps. cxix. 62, 164).

III. *The Conversion of the Jailor* (v. 26–30).

The jailor is sleeping—the prisoners are listening to the unwonted sounds of prayer and praise—suddenly He who never slumbers nor sleeps manifests His presence and His power. The earth quakes, the thick prison walls are rocking, the heavy gates are flung open, the prisoners' chains are loosed; the jailor roused from his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, supposes that the prisoners have escaped, and dreading the disgrace and death he knows will be his portion, he draws his sword, and is on the point of killing himself. But, at that instant, the voice of him whose feet he had made fast in the stocks is heard in the darkness, exclaiming—'*Do thyself no harm, for we are all here*' (v. 28). The sudden shock of the earthquake and its accompanying terrors, together with the calm endurance and forbearance of his prisoners, melted the hard heart of the jailor. Calling for lights, he sprang into the dark cell, and threw himself at the feet of the captives. Then, releasing them from the stocks, he brought them out, exclaiming in an agony of fear, '*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*' (v. 30).

Perhaps he was one of those who had heard the often-repeated cry of the possessed damsel (v. 17), and now that the arrow of conviction has pierced his heart, and the many sins of his past life crowd in upon his memory, he cries out in his misery for that teaching which could alone bring peace to his troubled soul.

4. *The Washing of Regeneration* (v. 31–40).

There is no need for S. Paul to preach repentance, for the *Holy Ghost* had already awakened his conscience, and con-

vinced him of sin ; he therefore simply points him to the crucified and risen Saviour. '*Believe on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and thou shalt be saved and thy house*' (v. 31). Deeply impressed, the jailor at once assembled his household in a little congregation, and in that same hour—worn and weary, and suffering as they were—Paul and Silas spoke to them of Him in whom alone they could find salvation.

Then, perhaps, taking his prisoners to the fountain or well in the prison-yard, the now repentant jailor washed their wounds, and was immediately afterwards, with his whole house, baptised into the faith—a Roman officer not ashamed to come forward boldly, and openly proclaim himself to be a disciple of the crucified Nazarene ; so powerful is the grace of God to melt and change the hardest hearts. Not till all this was accomplished, did they think of food or rest. Then the jailor brought them into his own house, and set food before them, believing and rejoicing in God with his whole house.

Morning dawned. The magistrates were troubled and uneasy. Perhaps they had felt the earthquake, or had heard the report of the startling events of that night in the prison, for they were anxious to hush up the whole matter, and get rid of these prisoners, whoever they might be, quietly. So they sent their attendants (probably the very men who had scourged Paul and Silas the day before) to the prison, bidding the jailor release them (v. 35). But S. Paul, when the message was brought to him, refused to leave the prison, until the magistrates had come in person to offer an apology for the injustice and violence they had committed against Roman citizens (v. 36–38).

S. Paul, on this occasion, asserted his claim as a Roman citizen, because it was necessary that their dismissal should be as widely known as their imprisonment had been, in order to secure safety and respect for the converts they were leaving at Phillipi. He might have used this privilege for his own *personal benefit* the previous day, but no doubt it was *revealed to him* that God required the sufferings of his

faithful servants for the carrying out of His gracious purposes, and they therefore rejoiced in those sufferings, knowing that they would result in the greater glory of God.

The magistrates were much alarmed when they heard that those whom they had treated so cruelly were Roman citizens, for to treat a Roman in such a manner was counted high treason, and was punishable with death. They therefore came very humbly to the prison to set them free, entreating their forgiveness, and urging them to leave the city for fear of some fresh outbreak. From the prison, Paul and Silas went to the house of Lydia, where they bade farewell to the assembled brethren, and gave them their last exhortation (probably leaving S. Luke in charge of the infant Church), before they proceeded further on their way.

From S. Paul's claim to be treated as a Roman (Acts xvi. 37, 38 ; xxii. 25-28), it appears that his father enjoyed the privilege of Roman citizenship, which was sometimes given to slaves and other foreigners for services rendered.

From the two instances recorded in this chapter, as well as from other passages in the Acts and the Epistles, it is abundantly evident that infant baptism has been the practice of the Church from the beginning, since the Apostles were in the habit of baptizing *whole households*.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. Salvation is the free gift of God, purchased for us by the Passion and Death of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. We become partakers of that salvation by a faithful use of the Sacraments which Christ has ordained. Holy Baptism places us in a '*state of salvation*,' and unites us to CHRIST—other sacraments nourish and sustain this union (Tit. iii. 5 ; 1 Pet. iii. 21 ; 2 Pet. i. 4 ; S. John xv. 4, 5). Salvation, like conversion, is a life-long work ; we are *being saved* all our life from the power of sin and Satan, in proportion as we faithfully co-operate with the grace of God bestowed upon us in the Sacraments.

2. *The proof of our faith lies in our obedience ; we must*

be *doers* of the Word, not *hearers* only, ready, like the Philippian jailor, to accept and act upon the teaching of the Church.

3. To learn to suffer, not only patiently but joyfully, remembering that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working out for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory (Rom. viii. 18 ; 2 Cor. iv. 16-18).

LESSON XXXI.

Thessalonica and Berea.

Read Acts xvii. 1-15. Learn S. John, xviii. 36 ; Ps. cxix. 18.

1. *The King's Messengers* (v. 1-3).

Along the great Roman road that led through the Macedonian cities, the unseen hand of CHRIST now led His faithful messengers, through Amphipolis and Appollonia, where they appear to have made no stay, on to Thessalonica, a hundred miles or more from Philippi, an important commercial city, and the capital of Macedonia.

Thessalonica, unlike Philippi, was a free city, governed by its own magistrates, and containing a large number of Jews. Here on three successive sabbaths, S. Paul went '*as his manner was*' to the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. The persecution and sufferings so recently borne at Philippi had no effect in damping his ardour ; again and again he explained the prophecies of the Old Testament to his fellow-countrymen, proving from Scripture that the CHRIST, the Messiah whom they were expecting, must needs die and rise again, and that this JESUS, this Man of Sorrows, who died and rose again, is indeed the very CHRIST.

2. *Another King, One JESUS* (v. 4-9).

Some there were even among the Jews who believed, and cast in their lot with the despised disciples of a suffering Messiah ; among them Aristarchus, the companion of S. Paul at Ephesus (ch. xix. 29), and afterwards at Rome.

But the larger number of converts were gathered from among the Gentiles, and as in the Gospels we are told that many faithful women followed our Blessed LORD and ministered to Him of their substance (S. Luke viii. 2, 3), so here

at Thessalonica, as at other cities where the Gospel of CHRIST was preached, not a few among the converts were women of rank and influence.

As it had been at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (ch. xiii. 45, 50; xiv. 2, 19), so it was at Thessalonica.

S. Paul's worst enemies were his own countrymen. The Jews, envious and angry at the success of the Christian missionaries, stirred up the ignorant and rude among the people to disturb the peace of the city, and persuaded them to attack the house of Jason, where S. Paul and his companions lodged, in order that they might be given up to the fury of the mob.

Disappointed at not finding those whom they sought, the mob seized upon Jason, and dragged him, together with several other disciples, before the rulers of the city, accusing them of being disturbers of the peace, and rebels against Cæsar, proclaiming '*another King, one JESUS*' (v. 7).

Perplexed and alarmed at this sudden and violent outbreak, the magistrates sought to pacify the people by binding over Jason and his companions to keep the peace, while allowing them at the same time to return in safety to their homes.

It seems strange—even had the accusation been true—that the rulers of the city should imagine that the authority of Cæsar could be endangered by the preaching of a few obscure Jewish artisans, for we have S. Paul's own testimony that while at Thessalonica, in addition to his spiritual labours, he worked hard, night and day, that he might procure his daily bread without being chargeable to any one (1 Thess. ii. 9).

Yet the accusation which had procured the condemnation of their King (S. John xix. 12, 15), was also repeatedly brought against His followers; the enemies of the Gospel of Christ finding in it a never-failing means of rousing the passions of the people, and enlisting the rulers on their side.

We know from S. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians, that he had taught them much about the setting up of the Kingdom of Christ and His second Advent in glory (1 Thess.

i. 10 ; iv. 13-17 ; v. 2 ; 2 Thess. i. 7-9 ; ii. 8), exhorting the disciples to walk worthy of the 'kingdom' (1 Thess. ii. 12 ; 2 Thess. i. 5), and encouraging them with the thought that though they might be called on to suffer much tribulation (1 Thess. iii. 4 ; 2 Thess. i. 5), yet He who had delivered them from the wrath to come (1 Thess. i. 10), could keep them safe until He should appear again in His eternal and glorious kingdom (1 Thess. ii. 13 ; v. 23), and their steadfastness even unto death would be to S. Paul himself a crown of rejoicing in the great Day of the Lord (1 Thess. ii. 19). This was the teaching which was now misunderstood, and misrepresented by those who could not distinguish between a temporal and a spiritual kingdom (S. John xviii. 36).

3. *An Encouraging Reception* (v. 10-15).

As it was quite clear that S. Paul's life would be endangered by a further stay in Thessalonica, the brethren determined to send him away secretly, and accordingly the great Apostle, "*persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed,*" left the ungrateful city by night, and, with his faithful companion Silas, sought refuge in the little town of Berea, which, being out of the main road, was less likely than the more important towns to attract the notice of his persecutors.

As S. Timothy's name is not mentioned, it is probable he was left in Thessalonica, to organise and build up the newly planted Church, and set in order all that was wanting. We learn from the Epistles to the different Churches that it was the invariable custom of the Apostles at once to organise a settled ministry, and to provide for the regular administration of the sacraments, and other ordinances of the Church, and it is plain from the frequent allusions to a regularly appointed ministry contained in the Epistle to the Thessalonians, that S. Paul had made abundant provision for the future needs of that Church, though his stay there had only lasted a few weeks (1 Thess. v. 12, 13 ; 2 Thess. ii. 15), and though this his first Epistle that has come down to us, was written only a very short time after his departure.

At Berea, S. Paul met with an encouraging reception. The Jews of this place were 'more noble,' more free from prejudice than those of Thessalonica. They were not only willing listeners, they also diligently examined the Old Testament Scriptures, and were consequently persuaded of the truth of the doctrine preached by S. Paul. The report of the success of S. Paul's preaching soon reached the synagogue of Thessalonica, and they instantly sent messengers to hinder the work of GOD, and stir up strife in the peaceful city.

Probably the same false charge of treason against Cæsar was again brought forward to stir the passions of the fickle multitude, making it necessary for the persecuted Apostle to leave the city, where the good seed had been sown under such favourable circumstances. Cheered by the loving sympathy of the '*brethren*,' the members of the newly formed Church at Berea, some of whom accompanied him in his flight, S. Paul was conveyed to the seashore, and from thence by sea to Athens, while Silas and Timothy remained a short time at Berea, doubtless, to make provision for the spiritual needs of the little community.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. To remember always that we are children of the Kingdom, and to try, day by day, to live as becomes those who have been made members of CHRIST—children of God—heirs of heaven.
2. To be prepared and willing to suffer for CHRIST's sake, either open persecution or ridicule, keeping ever before us the thought of the glorious reward promised to those who are faithful unto death (Rev. ii. 10).
3. The true followers of CHRIST are always loyal subjects to their earthly sovereign, for they know that the '*powers that be are ordained of God*' (Rom. xiii. 1; S. Mark xii. 17; 1 Pet. ii. 13, 17).
4. To pray for the spirit of *Understanding*, that we may be enabled to know the meaning of the Holy Scriptures, and understand more clearly the great mysteries of the Faith.

LESSON XXXII.

The City wholly given to Idolatry.

Read Acts xvii. 16-34; 1 Cor. i. 18-29. Learn S. Matt. xi. 25, 26; S. John xvii. 3.

1. *The Wisdom of the Greeks* (v. 16-18).

Picture S. Paul alone—a stranger in a strange land—waiting for his companions to join him at Athens, the most famous city of the old world. Even at this distance of time, learned men study the writings of those celebrated Greek philosophers, Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, and others who lived at Athens long before S. Paul's visit there; and the finest buildings and the most beautiful statues of our own time, cannot bear comparison with the beauty of the buildings and sculptures which met the eye of the great Apostle in every direction, as he trod the streets of Athens.

But the beauty and refinement of this highly-civilised city had no charm for S. Paul. In those days, Art, beautiful as it was, instead of leading the mind up to God, was but the handmaid of idolatry and vice, ministering to the worst passions of mankind. His spirit was '*stirred within him,*' not with pleasure and admiration, but with grief and passionate love for souls, and desires for their salvation, as he looked round and saw the gay, pleasure-loving city '*wholly given to idolatry.*'

He could not keep silence; day by day he disputed and reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews, and in the market with the Greeks, preaching unto them '*JESUS and the resurrection.*'

His presence and his message soon attracted attention. It was a new doctrine to the Athenians, unlike any they had heard before, and the philosophers, and so-called wise men of the different schools, began to question among themselves as to what this strange preacher could mean (v. 18). The Athenians, being a very idle set of people, and always extremely curious to hear some new thing, brought this unknown stranger out of the crowded market to the Areopagus, or hill of Mars, on the brow of which stood the temple of the god of war. The platform at the top of the hill was the place of meeting of the chief senators of Athens, who sat on benches hewn out of the rock; and here, removed from the noise of the city, where all could quietly sit and listen, S. Paul was called upon to explain what this new teaching was.

2. *The Unknown God* (v. 19-31).

Picture the great Apostle of the Gentiles as he stands forth in the midst of that vast multitude, whom curiosity had drawn together, and addresses them with earnest gaze and outstretched hand. '*Ye men of Athens,*' he exclaims, '*in all things I perceive ye are somewhat religious.*' (The word rendered *superstitious* in our version should be *religious*.) Instead of at once attacking their idolatry, S. Paul, with great skill and prudence, begins by acknowledging their well-known devoutness, and thus wins the attention of his listeners.

Then he tells them that in wandering through their city, and gazing on the statues and shrines where they offered their prayers, he had remarked an altar with this inscription: '*To the Unknown God.*' Perhaps this altar had been erected in consequence of some visitation, some famine or pestilence, which could not be ascribed to any particular god, and the Greeks had raised it in their anxiety to turn away the wrath of the deity who had caused this calamity to fall upon *them*.

S. Paul takes occasion from this incident to tell them

that this GOD, whom they worship in ignorance, is the great GOD who made the universe, and all things in it. He, being LORD of heaven and earth, is everywhere present. He has need of nothing that man can give Him, for He is the great First Cause of all, the Creator and Preserver of mankind, giving to all life, and breath, and all things. He has made of one blood all nations of men, ordaining and determining the bounds of their habitation, directing all things, overruling all things by His ever-watchful Providence. He has inspired men to seek Him, for He is not far from every one of us ; *'in Him we live and move and have our being,'* a truth which certain of their own poets had realised when they told them, *'For we are also His offspring.'* If, then, we are the offspring of GOD, we ought not to think that the GOD-HEAD is some material thing, such as gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device (v. 22, 29).

So far S. Paul was listened to with marked attention, although, while seeming to dwell only on points of agreement, he had been really exposing their ignorance, attacking their idolatry, and, by his strong assertion of the existence of a personal Creator, opposing the doctrines of the Epicureans and Stoics alike (*see Note*). He had also rebuked the national pride of the Athenians, who divided men into two classes, Greeks and Barbarians.

But S. Paul did not simply denounce the errors of his listeners by placing them side by side with the revelation of Divine Truth. He went on to tell his hearers that, during long centuries of their history, GOD had overlooked these errors which had been committed in ignorance, but that now the case was altered. This great GOD, the Creator and Disposer of all, had sent a message to all men everywhere, to repent and amend their lives—the kingdom of heaven was being preached to them—the Day of Judgment was proclaimed—that day in which He will judge the whole world in righteousness, by Him who is truly GOD, and also truly man, to whose work GOD had set His seal by raising Him from the dead.

3. *The Foolishness of the Cross* (v. 32-34).

S. Paul's speech was suddenly cut short by a burst of mocking laughter. They would not listen to the story of the Cross, and of the Resurrection ; it was foolishness to them. The congregation dispersed ; some mocked, others half promised to listen another day. A very few, whose hearts the Holy Spirit had touched, braving the scorn and ridicule of their fellow-countrymen, '*clave unto him and believed.*'

On that hill of Mars S. Paul never stood again. At Athens he founded no church, to Athens he wrote no epistle ; and often as he passed that way, he never appears to have visited the city again. As far as any immediate effect was concerned, his efforts there appeared to have ended in complete failure, and yet his labours were not in vain. Among the few who '*clave to him*' was Dionysius, the Areopagite, or member of the upper council of Athens. We learn from tradition, that, under his fostering care, the Church took deep root in Athens. He himself, its first bishop, won the crown of martyrdom. In the fourth century the Church at Athens sent her representative to the great Council of Nicea, and the two great fathers, S. Basil and S. Gregory Nazianzen, were educated in her schools.

Not many centuries after S. Paul stood on Mars Hill, apparently defeated, Christianity reigned triumphant ; the idol shrines had been everywhere replaced by the Cross, and the far-famed temple of Minerva had become a Christian Church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. To cultivate the virtues of tact and discretion in our dealings with others, and never needlessly wound their feelings, or offend their prejudices.

2. Not to keep back or disguise any truth because it is *unpopular*. S. Paul did not shun to '*declare the whole counsel of God*' (Acts xx. 27), though he never needlessly

provoked hostility. Perhaps his refraining from uttering the sacred Name of JESUS on Mars Hill, was owing to a desire to save his hearers from the sin of blasphemy.

3. Not to be discouraged at apparent failure, or expect to see the results of the work God gives us to do. Often that which has been sown in tears, yields an abundant harvest long afterwards.

4. There are many in these our own days like the Athenians, wholly given to idolatry, ever seeking to find amusement and satisfaction in some novelty or excitement. Often ambition, pleasure, self-gratification, love of money, or some other idol occupies the first place in our hearts, and God, whose temples we were made in our Baptism, is forgotten and rejected.

NOTE.—No less than four great schools of philosophy had their head-quarters at Athens : the followers of Aristotle and of Plato, the Epicureans, and the Stoics. The two first have exercised a great influence over Christian thought, the two latter only, appear to have encountered S. Paul.

The Epicureans believed that the world was the result of chance ; their highest aim was to live for pleasure and self-gratification. They did not believe in a future life ; their maxim was, ' Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die ' (1 Cor. xv. 32).

The Stoics, on the other hand, considered the great end of man to be the attainment of a complete power, not only over their passions, but over every circumstance of life, proudly indifferent to pain or sorrow, and also to the feelings of others.

The pride of the Stoics was as much opposed to the tenderness and humility of the Christian character, as the self-indulgence of the Epicureans was to its self-sacrifice and self-denial ; both would, therefore, naturally resent the teaching of S. Paul.

LESSON XXXIII.

The Power of the Cross at Corinth.

Read Acts xviii. 1-18. Learn 1 Cor. i. 23, 24; 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

1. *The Workshop at Corinth* (v. 1-3).

Unnoticed, and alone, S. Paul leaves Athens, and makes his way along the sea-coast to Corinth. Athens was the seat of culture, Corinth the seat of commerce, in the south of Greece. Instead of learned philosophers, or gossiping idlers, he would find its crowded streets full of busy traders from all parts of the civilised world. It was famous for its beautiful architecture, and also for the '*Isthmian games*,' from which S. Paul draws his illustrations of Christian life when writing to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. ix. 24-27). It was also a very wicked city, given up for the most part to every form of vice, so that such virtues as purity and honesty were almost unknown by its heathen population (1 Cor. v. 9, 10).

'*In weakness, in fear, and in much trembling*' (1 Cor. ii. 3), the great Apostle began his work in this wicked city. Perhaps his rejection at Athens had made him feel down-cast—then, too, he was alone; Silas was at Berea, Timothy at Thessalonica (1 Thess. iii. 1-5). Extreme poverty and bodily sickness were also added to his other sufferings (2 Cor. xi. 9); and, as at Thessalonica, he depended for his daily bread on the work of his hands. Nowhere so strongly as in his *Epistles* to the Corinthians does S. Paul express his feeling of weakness and absolute dependence upon God.

It was at Corinth he learnt to glory in his infirmities that the power of CHRIST might rest upon him. Though his person was held in ridicule and contempt, his *'bodily presence weak, his speech contemptible'* (2 Cor. x. 10), yet he could *'take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for CHRIST'S sake'* (2 Cor. xii. 10).

At Corinth S. Paul met for the first time with Aquila and Priscilla, who afterwards became two of his most valued helpers (Rom. xvi. 3, 4). They had been driven from Rome, perhaps on account of some Jewish disturbance, and had taken refuge at Corinth. A happy banishment, for it brought them to CHRIST and His Church, and their exile from an earthly city was overruled to be the means of bringing many to heaven. Aquila was a tentmaker, and, being of the same craft, S. Paul took up his abode under his roof. What a sacred spot was that little workshop at Corinth, shining all the more brightly because of the surrounding darkness! Think of the holy conversation of those unknown and despised tentmakers, the intercessions and praises that rose as sweet incense to heaven, as they bent over their coarse weaving.

2. *The Story of the Cross* (v. 4-8).

This was the subject of S. Paul's preaching at Corinth. At Thessalonica he had spoken of CHRIST as the great King who should one day return in power and glory to judge the world; at Athens he had spoken of the Living God, the Creator and Preserver of all; at Corinth he says, *'I determined not to know anything among you save JESUS CHRIST and Him crucified'* (1 Cor. ii. 2), the story of JESUS dying on the Cross for us men and for our salvation.

First to the Jews, then to the Greeks, did S. Paul deliver his message, holding up before them *'CHRIST crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness'* (1 Cor. i. 23). It was hard for Jews to believe that He who had been crucified as a malefactor was their conquering

Messiah ; it was harder still for Greeks, who prided themselves on their wisdom and superiority to all other nations, to accept One of a despised race, who had suffered the punishment of a criminal, as their Saviour and their King.

Yet the power of the Holy Spirit subdued many hard hearts both among Jews and Greeks. After the arrival of Silas and Timothy, who brought with them a contribution from the Church at Philippi for the relief of S. Paul's necessities (2 Cor. xi. 9 ; Phil. iv. 15), the work appears to have prospered wonderfully. On no Church were the *extraordinary* gifts of the Holy Ghost poured forth more abundantly than on that of Corinth (2 Cor. xii. 12, 13 ; 1 Cor. xiv.).

As success became apparent, the Jews, as usual his bitter enemies, stirred up opposition of so malignant a character, that S. Paul shook his raiment, exclaiming, '*Your blood be upon your own heads ; I am clean ; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles*' (v. 6), and, turning his back upon the synagogue, henceforth while at Corinth he made use of the house of Justus for the purposes of teaching and worship.

Among all the sorrows to which S. Paul alludes during his stay at Corinth, this determined opposition on the part of his fellow-countrymen appears to have grieved him most deeply. In his Epistle to the Thessalonians, written at this time, he speaks of them as '*those who please not God, and are contrary to all men,*' and as having, by their attempts to hinder the preaching of CHRIST among the Gentiles, filled up the measure of their sins (1 Thess. ii. 14-16).

Chief among the Christian converts in Corinth was Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, one of the few whom S. Paul baptized with his own hand (1 Cor. i. 16). Yet though God was thus giving the increase, it must have required great courage to stay on at Corinth, preaching the faith in the midst of determined opposition and bitter enmity (2 Thess. iii. 2).

3. *The Heavenly Vision* (v. 9, 10).

Perhaps it was when the heart of the Apostle was beginning to wax faint at the thought of the many difficulties which surrounded his path, that a heavenly vision was sent to cheer and comfort him. In the darkness and stillness of the night, that same radiant Form which had already appeared to him on the road to Damascus, and afterwards in the Temple, again stood by the side of His faithful servant, bidding him '*not be afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city*' (v. 9, 10). Yes! much people, even in wicked Corinth—even among the vilest, the lowest, and the most despised, for none are beyond the reach of God's converting grace, and the chiefest of sinners may be numbered among the saints, and shine hereafter as the stars in the firmament of heaven.

4. *The New Governor* (v. 11-18).

Cheered and strengthened by this glorious vision, S. Paul remained at Corinth for a year and a half, teaching the word of God among them.

At the end of that time a new governor was appointed for the province of Achaia—Gallio, brother of the famous philosopher, Seneca—one who was much beloved by all who knew him on account of his gentle and generous disposition.

The Jews, presuming on his probable inexperience, and no doubt thinking that the new governor would be glad of an opportunity of making himself popular by punishing an unknown Jew, whom they looked upon as their enemy, excited a tumult, and dragged the Apostle before his judgment-seat.

With supreme indifference the Roman Governor listened to the charges brought against S. Paul by his angry and excited fellow-countrymen (v. 12, 13). But when it was the prisoner's turn to make his defence, Gallio stopped him by a contemptuous dismissal of the charge. With

all a Roman's pride and haughtiness, he declined to listen to a number of questions about certain opinions, which had nothing to do with any offence against Roman law, and, refusing to be a judge of such matters, he bade his attendants clear the court, and drive the accusers from the judgment-seat.

Far better would it have been for Gallio, if, instead of turning aside with haughty disdain from questions which he considered to be beneath his notice, he had embraced the opportunity now offered him, and learnt from the lips of the prisoner who stood before him the way of salvation.

The surrounding crowd were quick to catch the tone of the magistrate. The Greeks, though they had not dared to interfere until the decision of the governor was made known, now ventured to display their animosity against the Jews by seizing upon Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beating him under the very eye of the governor. And Gallio, we are told, cared for none of these things. He would not interfere so long as there was no serious disturbance of the peace. He knew that the Jews were a turbulent race, and he probably soon dismissed the whole scene from his thoughts, little imagining that what he disdained to listen to as mere questions and opinions, and matters of Jewish law, would hereafter become the chiefest of all questions throughout the whole world.

After remaining some time longer in order to establish the Church firmly at Corinth, S. Paul took leave of the brethren, and returned to Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. At the busy little seaport of Cenchrea, where a Church had already been founded, S. Paul showed his readiness as a Jew to conform to Jewish observances by shaving his head, '*for he had a vow*' (v. 18). For some reason, either during sickness, or in the midst of his troubles at Corinth, he had taken upon himself for a time the vow of the Nazarite (Num. vi. 1-21). The two chief features of *this vow* were to abstain from intoxicating drink, and to let *the hair grow*. The first represented self-denial, the second

humility and self-abasement. Perhaps S. Paul took this vow upon him when, filled with a sense of his own weakness, he entered upon his mighty work at Corinth. The vow could only be brought to its fitting close by a journey to Jerusalem to offer up the hair ; but persons at a distance were allowed to cut the hair short and bring it with them to the Temple to be offered up when the rest was shaven. This appears to be what S. Paul did at Cenchrea before starting for Syria.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. One kind of work is not to be preferred to another, for all work is sacred if done for God. Whether S. Paul was working miracles, weaving goat's hair, or stitching leather hides for tent-coverings, his work was equally acceptable, because it was what God had given him to do.

2. God's saints have experienced like trials to our own : loneliness—anxiety—poverty—sickness : but if we wait patiently on God, in these and similar trials, we shall, like S. Paul, receive the gracious assurance of our blessed Lord's presence and protection.

3. God had much people in the wicked city of Corinth, and He still has much people in the wicked cities of this world. Though wickedness seems to abound, the '*LORD knoweth them that are His*,' as He knew Lot in Sodom, Joseph in Egypt, and the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. We must persevere in praying for those who never pray for themselves, and do all we can to bring them to the knowledge and love of God ; for it may be that some of those who appear to us steeped in sin may hereafter shine as stars in the firmament of heaven.

4. Pride and indifference are the great obstacles to the grace of God in the soul. Gallio neglected to inquire into the truth when it was brought before him, and the opportunity was lost, never to return. He became first the favourite, and then the victim of the infamous Emperor Nero, and was murdered by his orders.

NOTE.—S. Paul, and therefore, probably, all the other Apostles, were evidently not themselves in the habit of baptizing (1 Cor. i. 13–16). One chief reason of this seems to have been to avoid giving any support to divisions or parties in the Church; but it may also have been lest any should erroneously imagine that greater grace was conferred when the Sacrament was administered by an Apostle than by any of lesser rank in the Church.

The name of Priscilla appears before that of her husband Aquila in several places (Rom. xvi. 3; 2 Tim. iv. 9). It is probable, therefore, that she had an authorised position and office in the Church.

LESSON XXXIV.

Out of Darkness into Light.

Read Acts xviii. 19-28 ; xix. 1-10. Learn Gen. i. 3 ; 2 Cor. iv. 6.

1. *In Journeyings often* (ch. xviii. 19-23).

A few days' sail from Cenchrea, and S. Paul's vessel cast anchor in the famous harbour of Ephesus, then the great centre of the trade of the Mediterranean, but now a region of desolation. In S. Paul's time, Ephesus was by far the busiest and most populous city in Asia Minor. It lay at the meeting-point of great roads, commanding easy access to the whole continent. Its markets were filled with the produce of the whole world, gold and silver and precious stones, fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet—all manner of vessels of ivory and precious wood and marble—odours, and ointment, and frankincense—all the long list of costly luxuries enumerated by S. John (Rev. xviii. 12, 13) were familiar objects in this wealthy city at that time. Aquila and Priscilla had probably business connections with Ephesus which caused them to end their journey here.

Though his visit on this occasion was but a passing one, S. Paul sought out his own people as soon as he arrived. No amount of persecution from his fellow-countrymen could lessen his zeal to make known to them the glad news of salvation. His message was, on this occasion, received without opposition, the Jews even pressing him to stay longer with them.

This, however, he refused to do, on account of his anxiety to pay his vow at Jerusalem at the approaching feast of Pentecost, and he bade them farewell, promising to return shortly, if it should be God's will.

Landing at Cesarea, he hastened to Jerusalem, which he entered for the fourth time after his conversion. Very interesting must that visit of the great Apostle of the Gentiles have been to the Church at Jerusalem, and fervent must have been their acts of praise and thanksgivings, as they listened to the story of the gradual extension of CHRIST's Kingdom, and the founding of Churches, not only in Asia, but in the important European cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. Not many days of spiritual refreshment did the great Apostle allow himself at Jerusalem. He was eager to start on his third great missionary tour, and therefore went on to Antioch, from whence he passed once more through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, visiting the different Churches he had planted, and confirming them in the faith. (It appears from S. Paul's Epistles, that it was during this visit to the Church in Galatia that he established the weekly offertory there (1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2), and also found it necessary to address serious warnings to that fickle race who had received him so warmly, but who were already showing signs of a disaffected spirit (Gal. iv. 16-18).)

2. *Apollos the eloquent Rabbi* (ch. xviii. 24-28).

Among the many whom business or pleasure had brought to Ephesus was Apollos, a learned Jewish Rabbi from Alexandria. Years ago perhaps, when '*Jerusalem and all Judea*' were going forth to the wilderness, to hear from the lips of S. John Baptist the announcement of the coming Messiah, Apollos may have been one in that multitude. He had been baptized with the baptism of John, and was '*instructed in the way of the LORD*,' learned in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, full of zeal in proclaiming CHRIST as the Messiah, and *gifted with great eloquence*. Yet, though he could point to **Jesus** as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the

world (S. John i. 29), and was probably acquainted with the facts of His Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension, he knew nothing as yet of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost, nothing of that close union with God into which men are brought by baptism, the means by which alone we can enter CHRIST's Kingdom, and be made partakers of that salvation which He has purchased for us.

The power and courage with which he spoke, attracted the notice of Priscilla and Aquila. They invited him to their house, and *'expounded unto him the way of GOD more perfectly.'* The learned Rabbi was not too proud to receive instruction from the humble tent-maker and his wife, and after being baptized into CHRIST, he went over into Greece, taking with him letters of commendation to the Corinthian Elders, and becoming a pillar of strength to the brethren there (1 Cor. iii. 5, 22).

3. *The First Ordination at Ephesus* (ch. xix. 1-10).

By the time S. Paul arrived at Ephesus, Apollos had left for Corinth; but before his further instruction by Aquila and Priscilla he appears to have converted twelve disciples, who, like himself, were ignorant of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. They had been baptized as a token of their repentance, like the Jews in S. John Baptist's time, but they had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit, which could only be obtained through that baptism into the Name of the Holy Trinity which CHRIST Himself ordained (S. Matt. xxviii. 19). To these twelve disciples S. Paul explained the fuller doctrine of Christian baptism, and after baptizing them into the name of the LORD JESUS, he *'laid his hands upon them, and the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied.'*

Thus was the Church founded at Ephesus. All that Aquila and Priscilla had done was a work of preparation. No Church could properly be founded until the arrival of an Apostle, for none but an Apostle could, by laying on of hands,

impart those spiritual gifts which were essential to the organisation of a Church.

These twelve men, endued with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, were the nucleus of those Ephesian presbyters (or priests) whom S. Paul afterwards gathered round him at Miletus (ch. xx. 17). Very memorable were to be the results of this visit to Ephesus. The Roman capital of Asia Minor was chosen by God to be the third starting-point of Christianity, and to take a leading part in its full development under S. John the beloved Apostle.

For three months after his arrival, in accordance with his usual plan, S. Paul constantly resorted to the synagogue, arguing and reasoning with the Jews, and trying to persuade them to acknowledge JESUS as the Messiah. But when they not only refused to be persuaded, but also tried to hinder others, speaking evil of the Christian religion before the multitude, S. Paul departed from them, and separated his Christian followers from the Jews. As their numbers were now considerable, he hired the school of Tyrannus, and there the little band of Christians met for daily worship.

That three years' ministry (ch. xx. 31) must indeed have been a blessed time for Ephesus. We can see the great Apostle of the Gentiles toiling day after day, as at Corinth, at his tent-making, and yet finding time to go from street to street, and from house to house, '*warning every one night and day with tears—serving the LORD with all humility of mind*'—keeping back nothing that was profitable to his converts to know—declaring unto them the whole counsel of God, and persevering in these labours for three years, notwithstanding the trials and temptations which beset him on every side, and the determined opposition of the Jews (ch. xx. 17-31).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. Ephesus was a highly privileged Church. Yet, though founded by S. Paul, nurtured by S. Timothy, presided over for many years by the beloved Apostle, honoured with a

special message of warning and encouragement from the great Head of the Church (Rev. ii. 1-7), that once flourishing Church has long been extinct, her love died away, her candlestick was removed.

As it is with Churches, so is it with individuals. The highest spiritual privileges will but increase our condemnation, if we are unfaithful and our love grows cold. Our privileges and opportunities will be taken from us and given to those who will make a better use of them.

2. We should pray often for the Church in our own land, that her candlestick may never be removed, that she may guard with watchful, jealous care the precious deposit of the Faith once delivered unto the Saints, and faithfully fulfil the mission entrusted to her.

‘JESU, with Thy Church abide,
Be her Saviour, LORD, and Guide,
While on earth her faith is tried ;
We beseech Thee, hear us.

‘May she holy triumphs win,
Overcome the hosts of sin,
Gather all the nations in ;
We beseech Thee, hear us.’

3. Darkness stands for three things in Holy Scripture ‘*ignorance*’ (Eph. iv. 18), ‘*sin*’ (Eph. v. 8, 11 ; Rom. xiii. 12), ‘*misery*’ (S. Matt. xxv. 30). JESUS CHRIST, the Sun of Righteousness, came to turn this darkness into light. We must walk as children of light, casting off the works of darkness, those sins which we renounced in our baptism, and do all we can to spread the light of the Christian Faith among the ignorant and sinful, both at home and in heathen countries.

LESSON XXXV.

Triumphs of the Faith at Ephesus.

Read Acts xix. 11-41. Learn Phil. ii. 9-11 ; S. Matt. x. 32, 33.

1. *Victory over Superstition* (v. 11-20).

Greatly was S. Paul's ministry blessed. God wrought special miracles by his hands (S. John xiv. 12). Virtue streamed from him, as from his Divine Master of old, imparting a healing power to the very clothes he wore, so that aprons and handkerchiefs were carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases departed from them and the evil spirits went out (v. 12, comp. S. Matt. ix. 20, 21 ; xiv. 36).

Ephesus was an extremely superstitious city, where every kind of magical art was practised ; and therefore there was a special reason why these wonderful miracles were wrought there. It was to convince the Ephesians that the God whom S. Paul preached, was greater far than all the idols and sorcerers by whom they were being deceived.

Now there were at Ephesus certain wandering Jews, who went from one place to another, professing to be able to cast out devils. When they saw the power of the Sacred Name of JESUS, they were bold enough to invoke that Holy Name for the casting out of an evil spirit. But Satan knows well the difference between a real and a pretended servant of CHRIST. The man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped upon them, tore their clothes from their backs, and inflicted upon them such violent injuries, that they were fain to escape from the house, naked and wounded. Great fear and

astonishment fell on all who heard these things, and the Ephesian converts, many of whom still had secret dealings with magical arts, came forward boldly before all, confessed their evil deeds, and publicly burned their magic books—a costly sacrifice, proving, as nothing else could have done, the reality of their repentance, for the value of these books amounted to nearly £2,000. What things were gain to them, those they counted loss for CHRIST; they were not ashamed to confess CHRIST crucified before all men, and make all the reparation in their power for their past sin. *‘So mightily grew the word of GOD and prevailed’* (v. 20).

2. *The Temple-keeper of Diana* (v. 21–23).

After between two and three years’ stay at Ephesus, S. Paul was minded to visit once more the Churches of Macedonia and Achaia, passing from thence to Jerusalem, after which he hoped to see Rome. So he sent two of his little band of fellow-workers, Timothy and Erastus, into Macedonia to prepare for his reception, while he stayed on yet a little longer at Ephesus. Little did he foresee the storm of persecution which Satan was about to raise against the Church.

Ephesus was one of the chief strongholds of heathenism. Its far-famed Temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the world. Nearly the same length as S. Paul’s Cathedral, and more than twice as broad, this magnificent building was surrounded by 127 marble columns, 60 feet high, each of them the gift of a king. Within were columns of jasper, some of which are still in the great Mosque of S. Sophia at Constantinople—formerly a Christian church—precious woods in lavish profusion, and the finest works of art from the most celebrated painters and sculptors. The image of Diana enshrined in this temple, and which, it was believed, *‘fell down from Jupiter,’* was a hideous, rough, wooden figure, the shape of a mummy, more like a Hindoo idol than a Greek statue. It was the pride of the Ephesians to call their city the ‘temple-keeper’

of the goddess. (This is the true rendering of the word translated 'worshipper,' ch. xix. 35.) Ephesus was a 'free city,' governed by its own magistrate and popular assembly. Over its Church S. Timothy afterwards presided, and it became the home of the beloved Apostle in his old age. It stood first among the Seven Churches of Asia, and four centuries later the Third General Council of the Church was held there. But its candlestick has for centuries been removed, and shapeless ruins now mark the site of this once luxurious and populous city.

3. *Victory over Idolatry* (v. 23-41).

Very different was its outward aspect during the last month of S. Paul's residence there. It was the month of May, a month specially dedicated to the goddess Diana, in which was held a great fair, which attracted an immense concourse of people from all parts of Asia, and was attended with much splendour and revelry.

One of the great trades at Ephesus was that of the silversmiths. The '*silver shrines*,' or little models and medallions of the temple and image of Diana, were in great request as household gods, to be set up in private dwellings. The manufacture of these shrines was a large and profitable business, and the silversmiths were accustomed to reap large profits at this annual religious gathering. Great, then, was their anger when they found this year they were losing much of their custom.

As Christianity spread, and men turned from idols to serve the living God, these images of the mummy god were no longer asked for. The chief sufferer was a silversmith called Demetrius, who called together the workmen of like occupation, and pointed out to them the certainty of ruin if '*this Paul*' should be allowed any longer to persuade people '*that they be no gods which are made with hands.*' He then appealed to their religious passions, pretending that *his great anxiety* was to defend their religion, and to avenge *the despised greatness* of their temple and celebrated

goddess. The fury of the workmen was roused ; they raised a great tumult in the city. A multitude of people came together, not knowing the cause of the uproar ; and the theatre, a huge building capable of containing 30,000 people, was filled with an excited mob, who for the space of two hours shouted incessantly, '*Great is Diana of the Ephesians !*' The whole city was thrown into a state of riot. A rush was made for the Jewish quarter, and for the shop of Aquila, and the life of the Apostle was in extreme danger. Perhaps it was on this occasion that Aquila and Priscilla risked their lives for him (Rom. xvi. 4). As the place of his concealment could not be found, the mob seized two of his companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, and dragged them into the theatre. Full of anxiety for the fate of his companions, S. Paul eagerly desired to make his way there, and address the rioters ; but the disciples, fearing he would be torn in pieces by the furious mob, suffered him not. Certain also of the '*chief of Asia, which were his friends,*' entreated him not to venture into the theatre.

The Jews in vain attempted to obtain a hearing, being anxious to disclaim all connection with so unpopular a sect. They put forward Alexander, one of their number, to speak for them (perhaps the very same Alexander the copper-smith from whom S. Paul afterwards suffered much evil, 2 Tim. iv. 14, 15) ; but directly it was perceived that he was a Jew, he was silenced by a fresh outburst of '*Great is Diana of the Ephesians !*'

After this tumultuous scene had lasted two hours, the town-clerk, or recorder of the city, at length succeeded in restoring order. His speech was a model of tact and prudence (v. 35-41). He first flattered the vanity of the excited crowd, by referring to their acknowledged position as guardians of the great goddess. He then pointed out to them the folly of supposing that their temple had anything to fear from a few strangers who led quiet lives in their midst, and had never attempted to profane it. He also reminded them that the assizes were being at that time held,

and that all causes might there be lawfully decided ; and ended by telling them that by this unseemly uproar they were in danger of losing the privileges allowed them by their Roman governors.

The effect of this wise speech was instantaneous. The crowd, afraid of the possible consequences of this uncalled-for disturbance, suffered themselves to be quietly dismissed, and dispersed to their homes.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. Those who are in earnest about religion must expect to meet with opposition and persecution. Selfishness and self-interest often hide themselves under a cloak of religion to oppose the truth ; but whatever opposition Satan raises, the Church must triumph in the end, for the promise is sure, the gates of hell shall never prevail against her (S. Matt. xvi. 18).

2. To imitate the repentance of the Ephesian converts, which was made up of holy fear, confession, and amendment. By burning their books, the instruments of evil, they offered the costliest sacrifice and the most entire reparation in their power. No repentance is thorough which is wanting in one of these three parts.

3. If we would serve CHRIST faithfully, we must keep nothing back, cherish no secret hidden sin, but give up, at whatever cost, all that is contrary to His holy will (S. Matt. v. 29, 30).

LESSON XXXVI.

Sad Tidings from Corinth.

Read 1 Cor. iv. 9-13; 2 Cor. xi. 23-33; Acts xx. 1; 1 Cor. xvi. Learn Gal. vi. 1, 2; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

1. *The Care of all the Churches* (1 Cor. iv. 9-13; 2 Cor. xi. 22-33).

What a contrast there is between the record of the success granted to S. Paul's labours given us in the Acts, and the description he himself gives of the trials, sufferings, and anxieties, by means of which these glorious results were obtained!

At the very time when his influence was so widely felt, that Demetrius the silversmith declared that, not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout the whole province of Asia Minor, he had persuaded many people of the folly of idolatry—when his power of working miracles was so great that his very clothes possessed a healing power, he yet speaks of himself and of the other Apostles as of those who were made a 'spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men'—like their Master, suffering hunger and thirst—with no certain dwelling-place—reviled—persecuted—the off-scouring of all things (1 Cor. iv. 9-13). Yet, though troubled on every side, they were not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed—always bearing about in the body the dying of the LORD JESUS, that the life also of JESUS might be made manifest in them (2 Cor. iv. 7-11); giving no offence in any thing.

but in all things approving themselves as the ministers of God ; in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings—as dying and yet living, as chastened and not killed ; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; as poor, yet making many rich ; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things (2 Cor. vi. 3–10). In addition to these trials, what a record of outward perils and sufferings S. Paul enumerates (2 Cor. xi. 23–33).

‘*Visions and revelations of the LORD*’ (2 Cor. xii. 1) we may be sure were granted abundantly to these great Founders of CHRIST’S Church, to enable them to realise that the sufferings of this present time were not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be hereafter, and that their light affliction, which was but for a moment, was working out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (Rom. viii. 18 ; 2 Cor. iv. 17).

As it was with Elijah of old, who could at one moment fearlessly confront the impious king Ahab and his four hundred false prophets, call down fire from heaven, and by the power of his prayer deliver the land from drought (1 Kings xviii. ; S. James v. 17, 18) ; while immediately afterwards we see him lying under the juniper-tree, faint, and almost despairing of life (1 Kings xix. 4), so it is ever with the saints of God. Success must always be accompanied by some ‘*thorn in the flesh*,’ some ‘*messenger of Satan*’ permitted by God, lest they should be ‘*exalted above measure*,’ and forget that the power is of God, and that they are but earthen vessels to whom the treasure of God’s grace is entrusted.

Perhaps the anxiety which weighed most upon the mind of the great Apostle was ‘*the care of all the Churches*’ (2 Cor. xi. 28). Those seven Churches of Asia which afterwards became so famous, and which were planted by him, probably during his three years’ residence in Ephesus ; and also those fickle Galatians who were so ready to accept ‘*another gospel*’ (Gal. i. 6), as well as those European Churches near the centre of *the great Roman Empire*, needing such help and guid-

ance, because exposed to so great temptations—oh, how their needs, their difficulties, their sins, were remembered by him before the Throne of Grace !

2. *Messengers from Corinth* (1 Cor. xvi. 17).

Picture S. Paul in the workshop at Ephesus, with Aquila and Priscilla, weaving the coarse goats' hair used for tent-making, when three visitors are announced from Corinth.

How gladly they are welcomed ! How the Apostle rejoices over this opportunity of receiving tidings of his converts, and learning the state of the Church in that corrupt city. Fortunatus, Stephanas, and Achaicus (1 Cor. xvi. 17) are the bearers of a letter from the Church at Corinth, laying before S. Paul many difficulties which had arisen during his absence, and asking for his decision as to certain questions relating chiefly to the order to be observed in public worship, and the difficulties which beset the Christians in their social intercourse with the heathen around. When the Apostle had read the letter, he began to question the Corinthian delegates as to the condition of the Church at Corinth, and what he gathered in answer to his inquiries must indeed have filled him with deepest sorrow and anguish of soul.

From these converts, and from others of the household of Chloe (1 Cor. i. 11), S. Paul learned that the Church at Corinth was torn by violent disputes, and was split up into parties which had rent asunder its unity (1 Cor. i. 11, 12 ; iii. 3, 4 ; xi. 18). He heard sad rumours of '*envyings, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults*' (2 Cor. xii. 20). Even the assemblies of the Church had degenerated into wild and disorderly scenes, two or three preachers interrupting each other to gain the ear of the congregation (1 Cor. xiv. 26-30). There had also been grievous profanation and irreverence in connection with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist (1 Cor. xi. 17-22 ; 29-34). Some there were also who denied the doctrine of the Resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 12); others were lifted up with spiritual pride on account of the gifts which had been so abundantly bestowed on them

(1 Cor. iv. 7), and there were also those who despised S. Paul himself, spoke contemptuously of him, and disparaged his authority (1 Cor. iv. 3 ; ix. 2, 3 ; 2 Cor. iii. 1 ; x. 10). Many, growing weary of a life of self-denial and self-restraint, had taken part in heathen festivities, and eaten food which had been offered in sacrifice to idols (1 Cor. viii.) ; one prominent member of the Church had been guilty of grievous sin from which the very heathen were free—and yet this sin had gone unpunished, and he had been allowed to remain in the Christian community (1 Cor. v.).

Not a word about these grievous disorders was there in the letter from Corinth ; the Corinthian Christians were so lifted up with spiritual pride on account of the wonderful gifts which had been poured out so abundantly upon them, that they appear to have been quite blind to the terrible sins into which they had fallen.

As he listened to this dark catalogue of offences, the heart of S. Paul must have been filled with bitter shame and grief. We can see him laying his sore trouble before God, and pouring out his whole soul in earnest intercession on behalf of those sinful disciples ; and we can see him too, sitting down to dictate his first Epistle to the Corinthians, so different to what any human composition would have been under similar circumstances ; so loving, so wise, so faithful, every word inspired by the Holy Ghost.

3. *Letter to Corinth.*

After thanking God for the grace given them in CHRIST JESUS, he reproves the Corinthian Church for their religious dissensions and divisions, and impresses upon them the folly of all human wisdom as compared with the wisdom of the Cross of CHRIST (1 Cor. i. 23 ; ii. 1-9).

He reminds them of their obligation to holiness of life on account of their incorporation by baptism into the mystical *Body of CHRIST* (1 Cor. vi. 15), and the consecration of their *bodies as temples* of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. iii. 16 ; vi. 19).

He tells them that, redeemed by CHRIST, they are not their own, but His, and are therefore bound to glorify Him in their bodies (1 Cor. vi. 20 ; vii. 23), those bodies which are designed for a glorious immortality (1 Cor. xv. 42-54).

He warns them that, in the use of things indifferent, they are to consider the spiritual good of others, and do nothing to offend a weak brother (1 Cor. viii. 11-13 ; x. 23-32). He urges the sacred duty of providing for the Pastors of the Church (1 Cor. ix. 7-15), and corrects the abuses which had crept in, in the administration of Holy Communion (1 Cor. xi. 17-33). He explains to them the true use of extraordinary gifts, such as speaking with tongues, and warns them that no gifts or graces are of any avail to those who possess them, unless they use them in a spirit of *charity*—love to God, and love to man (1 Cor. xiii. xiv.) He also utters the terrible sentence of excommunication against that offender whose sin had been so lightly passed over (1 Cor. v. 3-5), delivering him over ‘*to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the LORD JESUS.*’

4. *Anxiety and Suspense* (2 Cor. ii. 1-5).

The messengers have returned to Corinth, and the great Apostle is full of anxiety to know how his letter will be received. There has been so much to reprove, so many severe things to write, he fears lest that letter should alienate still further those whom he loves so deeply (2 Cor. vii. 8).

To relieve his anxiety he sends Titus to Corinth (2 Cor. xii. 18) ; and shortly after leaves Ephesus for Troas, hoping to meet Titus on his return from Corinth, that he may receive tidings of his beloved converts in that city. Disappointed and perplexed as to the cause of his delay, and finding no rest in his spirit, the Apostle sets sail from Troas, and crosses over to Macedonia, there to await, probably among his friends at Philippi, the return of Titus (2 Cor. ii. 12, 13).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. There is nothing so blinding as pride ; and spiritual pride is the most dangerous and subtle form of this hateful

sin. We cannot repent of our sins until we see them, and we cannot see them without the help of God's grace. '*God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble ;*' the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to convince the soul of sin, cannot find entrance into a heart filled with pride.

2. '*Faithful are the wounds of a friend.*' Our truest and best friends are those who point out honestly our faults. We should esteem very highly so real a mark of friendship, and accept reproof with gratitude and humility.

3. It is quite possible to possess very high spiritual privileges, and yet to be Christians in *name* only. The greatest hindrance to the spread of Christianity among the heathen arises from the bad lives of professing Christians, who are sometimes guilty of sins of which the very heathen are ashamed. We should examine ourselves very frequently as to whether we are walking worthy of our high calling, whether our life is in accordance with our profession, praying often, '*O, cleanse Thou me from my secret faults—keep Thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they should get the dominion over me.*'

LESSON XXXVII.

Repentance and Reconciliation.

Read Acts xx. 2-5 ; 2 Cor. vii. 5-16 ; parts of chs. viii. and ix. Learn 2 Cor. v. 20 ; vii. 10, 11.

1. *Return of Titus* (2 Cor. vii. 5-16).

S. Paul appears to have left Ephesus directly after the Feast of Pentecost, and to have paid his farewell visit to the Ephesian Elders just after the Passover, the following year (1 Cor. xvi. 8 ; Acts xx. 6, 16, 17). Very brief is the record S. Luke gives of these ten months spent in the cities of Macedonia and Greece.

Arrived in Macedonia, no doubt at Philippi, among his kindest friends (Phil. i. 7 ; iv. 1, 15), yet not meeting Titus there, S. Paul grew more and more uneasy. '*Without were fightings, within were fears*' (2 Cor. vii. 5). At length this suspense came to an end, and the Apostle was gladdened by the return of Titus from Corinth, bringing the glad news that the Corinthians had received him with '*fear and trembling*,' that they had exercised a '*godly sorrow*' for those sins which had called forth his rebukes, and this godly sorrow had resulted in amendment of life ; in '*carefulness*,' '*zeal*,' '*vehement desire*,' '*obedience*' (2 Cor. vii. 6-15). Still there was a dark side to the picture. Some there were who still opposed and calumniated the great Apostle, despising his authority, and spreading slanderous reports (2 Cor. iii. 1 ; v. 11 ; vii. 2, 3 ; x. 10 ; xi. 18-20).

Very solemn are the threatenings and the warnings addressed to those who still opposed themselves (2 Cor. x. 10, 11 ; xii. 20, 21 ; xiii. 2, 10), while to those who had repented, his messages are full of comfort and encouragement, and assurances of his love and sympathy (2 Cor. i. 3-7 ; ii. 2-5 ; vii. 3-16). This letter was sent by Titus, who returned to

Corinth to finish the good work which had been begun there (2 Cor. viii. 6), while S. Paul himself stayed on for several months in the cities of Macedonia, extending the field of his labours as far as Illyricum, a country to the north-east of Macedonia, which place he mentions as the furthest point of his missionary journeys at this time (Rom. xv. 19).

2. *Visit to Corinth* (Acts xx. 3).

His mission in Macedonia ended, S. Paul paid his second visit to Corinth. We are told very little of his doings during the three months spent in that city. We know that he lodged with the hospitable Gaius (Rom xvi. 23), and that he was surrounded, for a brief period, by those who were specially dear to him—Timothy, Titus, and S. Luke ; Jason, Aristarchus Secundus, and many more of his tried and faithful companions, being with him during this period. A holy and peaceful time it must have been, and though there was much to set in order in the Corinthian Church itself, yet S. Paul found time during these three months to write two Epistles, the Epistle to the Galatians, and the Epistle to the Romans.

3. *The Weekly Offertory* (2 Cor. viii. ix.)

We may gather much from S. Paul's writings of the organisation and discipline of the early Church. We can, as it were, see the little community at Corinth assembled in the room of Justus, the first Christian Church in that city (ch. xviii. 7)—the women veiled and keeping silence in the Church ; we seem to hear the psalm, or the doctrine, or the wonderful utterances of those who spake with tongues—the loud Amen after the consecration of the Holy Eucharist. We know how the rich were exhorted to relieve the wants of their poorer brethren—how the laity were expected to contribute to the support of the ministry—how every Lord's Day there was an offertory for the poor in Judea. We know, too, something of the discipline of the infant Church, how any who had a dispute with another was exhorted to lay the matter before the Church to decide, and we may learn what ~~was~~ the terrible sentence of excommunication for any who

were guilty of grievous sin (1 Cor. xiv.; xvi. 1-3; x. 16; v. 3-5; ix. 11-14; vi. 1). There are two whole chapters in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (chs. viii. and ix.) impressing upon the Church the duty of the weekly offering. To the Churches of Macedonia and Athenia, as well as to those of Asia Minor, S. Paul was never weary of pleading on behalf of the '*poor saints at Jerusalem*' (Rom. xv. 26; 1 Cor. xvi. 1). There were many famines in Judea at that time (Acts xi. 28-30), and the Christians there were very poor, no doubt having lost much in the persecutions they had suffered. The Gentile converts were continually reminded that they *owed* this money to their brethren in Judea, in return for the spiritual blessings they had received from them (Rom. xv. 27), and S. Paul hoped by means of their liberality, to unite the Jewish and Gentile Christians in one bond of love, trusting that the generous gifts sent by the Gentiles to the Church at Jerusalem, might be the means of removing the jealousies and differences which separated them, and of binding them together as one (Rom. xv. 30, 31).

But S. Paul does not only plead for those at a distance; he reminds the rich that they are bound to relieve the wants of the poor (2 Cor. viii. 13-15), he tries to provoke the Corinthians '*to love and to good works*' (Heb. x. 24) by the good example of the Christians in Macedonia, who out of their deep poverty had given generously, beyond their power (2 Cor. viii. 1-3); he reminds them of what CHRIST had done for them (2 Cor. viii. 9), the poverty He endured that we might be rich; he urges that the poor should not be excluded from this privilege of giving to God, for the poor man's gift, small though it may be, is often far greater in proportion, and therefore more acceptable to God, than the offerings of the rich (2 Cor. viii. 12; S. Luke xxi. 1-4); he bids them remember that those who give the most generously to God in this life, will reap the most abundant harvest hereafter (2 Cor. ix. 6; 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19); and exhorts them to give *regularly—according to their ability—and 'willingly,' 'not grudgingly or of necessity,'* but out of love to God and the poor (1 Cor. xvi. 2; 2 Cor. ix. 7).

4. *The last Journey to Jerusalem* (Acts xx. 3-5).

S. Paul had now completed the great work given him to do in Asia, Macedonia and Greece. Churches had everywhere been planted and organised in these parts (1 Cor. iii. 6, 10; Rom. xv. 19, 23). He now desired to go further west—to visit Rome, and afterwards Spain (Rom. xv. 22-24, 28, 29); but first he must go once more to Jerusalem, to report all that he had done (Acts xxi. 19), and make a final effort to unite the Jewish and Gentile branches of the Church.

For this purpose, he takes with him representatives from various fields of labour as living witnesses of God's favour to the Gentiles (Acts xx. 4), and these would carry with them the alms which were intended as a peace-offering to soften the hearts of the Jewish Christians towards their Gentile brethren (Acts xxiv. 17).

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. None are too poor to give to God. Whatever we possess is a loan from Him, and we shall have to account to Him for the use or misuse of every gift and talent entrusted to us. It is the bounden duty of all to set aside a fixed portion of their income, whatever it may be, for charitable purposes. God claimed from His ancient people the tenth part of all they possessed: hence the obligation of giving tithes to the Church; but Christians ought to give more abundantly, out of gratitude for the greater blessings they have received (Lev. xxvii. 30; 2 Chron. xxxi. 5, 6, 12; Mal. iii. 10).

2. Our spiritual life must be made up of fresh beginnings. There is always a tendency in us to lower our aim, to relax our efforts—to fall into self-pleasing ways—to adopt the standard of those among whom we live, instead of keeping before us the thought of JESUS CHRIST crucified. If such a one as S. Paul found it necessary to exercise self-denial and self-mortification, to keep under his body, and bring it into subjection (1 Cor. ix. 24-27), how can such as we are, expect to win heaven, if we are leading a careless, self-pleasing life?

‘ Christian, dost thou hear them,
How they speak thee fair ?
“ Always fast and vigil,
Always watch and prayer.”
Christian, answer boldly,
“ While I breathe, I pray.”
Peace shall follow battle,
Night shall end in day.’

3. There are two kinds of sorrow for sin : one is the ‘ *sorrow of the world*,’ sorrow for the consequences of sin, and this sorrow, like that of Judas, ends in remorse and despair ; the other is a ‘ *godly sorrow*,’ mourning over the sin, because by it we have displeased God, our merciful and loving Father, and this sorrow will lead us to true repentance, and to seek for pardon and reconciliation with God in His appointed way (S. John xx. 22, 23 ; 2 Cor. v. 19, 20).

NOTE.—The Epistle of Clement, one of the first Bishops of Rome, to the Corinthians, the oldest of the Christian writings not included in the Canon of Scripture, has some interesting notices of the Church of Corinth. The Epistle was probably written a few years after S. Paul’s martyrdom, and during the lifetime of S. John. It praises the Corinthians for their faith, their piety, their hospitality, and their knowledge. It speaks of them as humble, high-minded in nothing, more ready to give than to receive. But their besetting fault still clings to them. ‘ Why,’ asks S. Clement, ‘ are strifes, and wrath, and dissensions, and contention among you ? Why do we rend and tear in sunder the members of CHRIST, and revolt against our own body, and come to such a pitch of folly as to forget that we are members one of another ?’ And he goes on to remind them of the warnings addressed to them in the ‘ Epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle.’

LESSON XXXVIII.

A Congregation at Troas.

Read Acts xx. 3-12. Learn S. John vi. 53 ; 1 Cor. xi. 27, 28.

1. *'In perils by mine own countrymen (v. 3-6).*

S. Paul is about to sail into Syria, when, just as he is starting, he receives a timely warning that the Jews, his bitter enemies, have laid a plot to murder him. Their previous attempt, five years earlier, having failed through the refusal of Gallio to listen to the charges brought against him, they now determined to carry out their design at sea, where Roman authority could not hinder them.

In order to escape this peril, S. Paul, attended by seven companions, returned to Philippi, through Macedonia, where he remained for the Easter Festival, sending his companions on, to await his arrival at Troas.

At Philippi, he was once more joined by S. Luke, who, as far as we know, remained with him from this time to the end. (Notice the change to the first person plural in v. 5.)

Very happy must that Easter Festival have been; celebrated by S. Paul in the Church he loved best, among the most blameless and warm-hearted of all his converts. Immediately after the Octave of Easter he set sail for Troas, but, owing probably to contrary winds, the *voyage* lasted five days, instead of two, as on a former occasion (*ch. xvi. 11*).

Twice already had S. Paul visited Troas, but both his former visits had been cut short ; once by the vision of the ' *man of Macedonia* ' (ch. xvi. 9), and once by his anxiety to meet Titus (2 Cor. ii. 12, 13). His week's sojourn at Troas on this occasion gives us an insight into early Christian worship.

2. *Sunday Evening in Apostolic Times* (v. 7, 8).

On the evening of the first day of the week, already observed as a holy-day in honour of the Resurrection (1 Cor. xvi. 2 ; Rev. i. 10), S. Paul celebrated the Holy Eucharist, and preached to the little company of Christians gathered together in the Upper room, which served them for a church. We are not told the subject of the sermon, but the word *preached* is better rendered *discoursed*, so that the meeting was probably one where reasoning and conversation were used to solve any doubts, or clear away any difficulties which might arise in the minds of the Christians at Troas. It was an evening meeting, for at this very early period, the Christians were accustomed to meet together in the evening, and partake of a supper called the Agape, or Feast of Charity (S. Jude 12), which was preceded or followed by Holy Communion.

This practice probably arose from the desire to conform as closely as possible to the pattern of the first celebration of the Holy Eucharist by our LORD Himself, but, as we learn from the Epistle to the Corinthians, it had already led to great irreverence. S. Paul, when writing on this subject to the Corinthian Church, after reproving them for their irregularity and profanation of the Holy Eucharist, and giving various directions to ensure greater reverence in future, adds, ' *The rest will I set in order when I come* ' (1 Cor. xi. 34). It has been supposed that the practice of receiving the Holy Communion before other food has been partaken of, so universally observed by the Church, until, owing to laxity and self-indulgence, the commands of the Church were too

frequently set aside, was the outcome of the regulations then made by S. Paul. (See Note at the end of this Lesson.)

Perhaps the Upper room was all the more crowded, because it was known that the Apostle was about to depart on the following morning. The room was lighted with many lamps, for Christians were not yet obliged to carry on their worship in darkness and secrecy ; and in the earnestness of his overflowing heart, the great Apostle forgets the lateness of the hour, and continues his discourse until midnight.

3. *A Startling Interruption* (v. 9-12).

On the broad sill of one of the windows, thrown wide open to let in the cool night air, sat a lad named Eutychus. Very likely he was weary with his day's toil ; probably the '*many lights*' made the air very oppressive. He was not a careless hearer : the words '*borne down with deep sleep*' (Rev. Ver.) imply that sleep overcame him—he could no longer keep awake. Gradually, his head sinks upon his breast, and at last, losing all consciousness, he falls through the window of the upper storey on to the floor of the courtyard beneath. We can fancy the alarm and excitement, as some of the congregation hasten to the spot, and find the poor lad has been killed by his fall. We can hear the cry of wailing and horror from the bystanders—we can see the great Apostle, calm and undisturbed, as those only can be who enjoy continual communion with God. He falls upon the dead body, clasps it in his arms, and stills the excited crowd with the words, '*Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him.*' The departed soul returns once more, the boy is given over, probably, to the care of the deaconesses, or other women who were present, and the Apostle returns with the congregation to the Upper room, where he celebrates the Holy Eucharist, partakes of the Agape, or Feast of Charity, and remains till daybreak. By that time Eutychus had fully recovered. They brought the lad again into the Upper room, before the Apostle's departure, doubtless that he might return thanks *for his wonderful restoration to life, and that all might be witnesses of the truth of the miracle.*

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. Every day belongs to God, and we are bound to serve Him on all of them ; but there are certain days which we should devote in a special manner to His worship. The institution of the Sabbath, or day of rest, is as old as the creation of the world (Gen. ii. 3). The Jews observed the seventh day by resting from unnecessary work, by a double offering at the morning and evening sacrifice (Numb. xxviii. 9), and by renewal of the shew-bread (Lev. xxiv. 6-8). The Church has appointed that the first day, instead of the seventh, should be kept to celebrate the glorious Resurrection of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, so that each Sunday should be as it were an echo of the first Easter Day. Sunday should also bring to our remembrance the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. The Church teaches us to keep Sunday holy by joining in the public services of the Church, and especially by attending a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. We must also rest from labour, and only do works of charity and of necessity on that day.

2. We should always receive Holy Communion early in the morning, and fasting since midnight, out of reverence, and obedience to the command of the Church.

NOTE.—So universal has been the practice of receiving Holy Communion early in the morning, from the earliest period of the history of the Church, that Pliny, a heathen pro-consul, writing to the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 104) about the Christians, states that their custom was to meet before daylight to worship CHRIST, and the description he gives of their proceedings, shows clearly that they met thus early for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Christian writers, from A.D. 200, all speak of fasting Communion as the universal custom of the Church. S. Augustine (A.D. 430) says : 'It is clear that when the disciples first received the Body and Blood of the LORD they had not been fasting. Must we, therefore, censure the universal Church because the Sacra-

ment is everywhere partaken of by persons fasting? Nay, verily, for from that time it pleased the Holy Spirit to appoint for the honour of so great a Sacrament, that the Body of the LORD should take the precedence of all other food entering the mouth of a Christian; and it is for this reason that the custom referred to is universally observed. . . . Our Saviour did not prescribe the order in which this mystery was to be observed, reserving this to be done by the Apostles, through whom He intended to arrange all matters pertaining to the Churches.'

The late Bishop Wilberforce, writing against evening Communion, says that, from Pliny's letter downwards, we have an unbroken chain of proof as to the practice of the Church.

Bishop Wordsworth says: 'There are three acts of special reverence to our LORD's Body which have been embedded in the pages of the Bible by God the Holy Ghost. First, we are told that when the Saviour of the world was born the Virgin brought forth "*her firstborn Son*" (S. Luke ii. 7). Secondly, when our LORD rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the entry was made upon an ass's colt, "*whereon yet never man sat*" (S. Mark xi. 2; S. Luke xix. 30). Thirdly, after our LORD's death, S. Joseph of Arimathea laid the sacred Body "*in his own new tomb*" (S. Matt. xxvii. 60), "*wherein never man before was laid*" (S. Luke xxiii. 53). And the Catholic Church, "*discerning the LORD's Body*" (1 Cor. xi. 29) in the Sacrament of the Altar, has observed the custom of preparing for Him who deigns to come under our roof, a lodging in which nothing has that day been previously laid.'

LESSON XXXIX.

The Master's Footprints.

Read Acts xx. 13-38. Learn Isa. xxvi. 3 ; S. James i. 12.

1. *The Fellowship of His Sufferings* (v. 13).

There was not one of Christ's Apostles who had learned the lesson of the Cross more profoundly than S. Paul. '*I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake*' (Acts ix. 16), were words which must ever have rung in the ears of the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

And now the shadow of still greater sufferings than those he had hitherto borne was upon him. His concluding words in the Epistle to the Romans, written on the eve of his departure from Corinth, shew that he was fully conscious that his time had come for a yet nearer fellowship in the sufferings of his LORD and Master (Rom. xv. 30, 31).

The determined enmity, the repeated plots of his own countrymen, from one of which he had only just escaped (ch. xx. 3), must have helped to strengthen this conviction.

On quitting Troas, S. Paul left his companions to pursue their journey by ship as far as Assos, where he rejoined them, having walked the twenty miles which separates Troas from Assos.

The Apostle evidently felt the need of solitude and communion with GOD, before entering on the path of suffering which lay before him. There is always a craving in the souls of GOD's saints to be alone with Him, in order to realise His

presence more fully; and the more unwearied are their labours, the more they devote themselves to the service of others for His sake, the more intensely do they feel the necessity of these seasons of solitude and spiritual refreshment. The soul is never less alone than when in solitude, for then it realises far more vividly than at other times, the presence of God, and the companionship of the holy angels.

S. Paul had just passed through a time of exceptional trial and anxiety; the '*cure of all the Churches*' had pressed upon him with peculiar force, and now he was called to tread closer still in the Master's footsteps, and, like Him, '*in the way going up to Jerusalem*' (S. Mark x. 32-34), to warn those whom he so tenderly loved, of his approaching sufferings. He must bid a loving farewell to those Gentile Churches which owed so much to him. He had planted, others must water. It grieved him to think of the trials and persecutions that were in store for them (v. 29, 30), and that in all probability he would never visit them again.

Like his Master, he would prepare for coming trial by lonely communing with God (S. Mark i. 35; S. Matt. xiv. 23). We may be sure that, as he climbed the hills, and traversed the great oak forests between Troas and Assos, angels were sent to strengthen him, and that sweet visions of coming rest and future joy, cheered the faithful servant of God, enabling him joyfully to embrace the trials and sufferings which he foresaw. So that when he bade farewell to the Elders of Ephesus he could say: '*None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy*' (v. 24); and at Caesarea: '*What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus*' (ch. xxi. 13).

2. *An Episcopal Charge* (v. 14-35).

That quiet restful time was over all too soon. At Assos, S. Paul joined his companions in the little trading vessel,

and passing in and out between the rocky mainland and the fruitful islands, bright with the flowers of spring, they touched successively at Mitylene, the capital of Lesbos, and the islands of Chios, Samos, and Trogyllium ; for the voyage was made in a coasting vessel, and the nights were spent in some harbour. (This and every lesson which relates to the journeys of S. Paul should be illustrated by means of a map, otherwise the places mentioned will be but an unmeaning string of names.)

On the fourth day after leaving Troas, the ship passed the harbour of Ephesus, and anchored at Miletus, thirty miles beyond. Gladly would S. Paul have visited his beloved church at Ephesus, but he was hastening to Jerusalem in order to get there by the Feast of Pentecost, and it was probably to avoid the delay which a visit to Ephesus would have caused, that he took his passage in a ship bound for other ports.

At Miletus there appears to have been a delay of two or three days, and S. Paul at once sent a messenger to the Elders of the Church of Ephesus to come and meet him there.

How solemn and affecting must have been that parting charge of the great Apostle, to those who were to carry on the great work he had begun at Ephesus ! How earnestly he incites them to diligence and faithfulness (v. 28), reminding them of his own personal life during his three years' ministry among them—his tears and trials (v. 19), his unceasing watchfulness (v. 31), his faithfulness in proclaiming the whole plan of salvation (v. 21, 27), his unselfish toil to support himself and his companions (v. 33-35) ! He tells them, too, of his own coming sufferings (v. 22-25), and warns them of the dangers which shall befall the Church after his departure : persecutions from without, false teachers from within (v. 29, 30) (comp. 1 Tim. i. 20 ; 2 Tim. i. 15 ; 1 John ii. 19 ; Rev. ii. 6). He tells them that he is not running into danger without Divine guidance, but because constrained and carried by the Holy Spirit, and therefore

ready to embrace joyfully every form of suffering (v. 22-24). He concludes with a saying of our blessed LORD, which is not found in the Four Gospels—words which may have been the motto of his own self-sacrificing life—‘*It is more blessed to give than to receive*’ (v. 25).

3. *The Last Farewell* (v. 36-38).

Very sad and very touching must that last parting have been. We can see the little group kneeling on the sea-shore, while the Apostle pours forth his soul in earnest, fervent prayer for the Church he loves so well. In union with the intercession of the great Master before His Passion, he pleads for those he is leaving, that they may be one, and that the grace of God may build them up, and give them the inheritance among all them that are sanctified (v. 32). The prayer ended, they fall on his neck and kiss him again and again, their hearts full of sorrow, as were those of the Apostles in the Upper room (S. John xvi. 6) at the thought of losing Him who had borne so much for them, and whom they loved so well. Sadly, and with many forebodings of coming evil, they accompany him to the ship, and stand watching and weeping till the sails become a mere speck on the horizon, and then with heavy hearts they return to Ephesus, to carry out the last loving counsels of their beloved teacher and guide.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. Not to try to avoid that which is hard and painful, but joyfully to embrace it in the strength God will give us if we ask Him.

2. To prepare for coming trial by earnest prayer and communing with God.

3. To listen for the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, and never to let the entreaties and persuasions of those we love, or the prospect of trial and suffering, turn us aside

from any path of self-sacrifice to which we feel God is calling us.

NOTE.—‘Overseers’ or ‘bishops,’ and ‘presbyters,’ were in the days of the Apostles synonymous terms. The word was used to denote those who governed or presided in the different Churches. In the succeeding generation and in all subsequent times, the term ‘overseer’ or ‘bishop’ has been restricted to those who have succeeded the Apostles in their office; the name *Apostle* being applied apparently to those only who had seen our blessed LORD, and had received their commission immediately from Him. It is on this ground that S. Paul claims the title for himself (1 Cor. ix. 1).

The word ‘*sanctified*’ (v. 32) means those who are ‘*called to be saints*,’ all who are consecrated to God in Holy Baptism.

LESSON XL.

Onward to Jerusalem.

Read Acts xxi. 1-26. Learn v. 13; Col. i. 24.

1. *Another Sorrowful Parting (v. 1-6).*

S. Paul and his companions, on the evening of the day of his departure from Ephesus, came to Coos, a small island at the entrance of the Archipelago; the day following they reach the famous island of Rhodes, and on the third day they arrive at Patara on the sea coast, where the little vessel was to unlade her cargo.

Here, finding another vessel bound for Phenicia, they at once went on board, and, after three days' quick sailing, passing on their way the snowy peaks of Cyprus, and catching sight of Paphos, the scene of S. Paul's first great victory over superstition and heathenism (ch. xiii. 6-12), they landed at Tyre.

In this ancient city S. Paul tarried seven days, and was entreated by the disciples not to go up to Jerusalem. But nothing could turn him from his purpose. Perfectly aware that bonds and afflictions awaited him (ch. xx. 22-23), the impulse of the Holy Spirit yet urged him forward, revealing to him that it was God's will that he should suffer, and that his sufferings would result in the triumph of the great cause in which he was engaged. Another sad farewell—men and women and little children coming out of the city to see the last of their beloved *teacher*, and kneeling down on the beach to pray, and to *receive his last blessing*.

II. *'Ready, not to be bound only, but also to die'* (v. 7-14).

From Tyre to Ptolemais (the modern Acre), and from Ptolemais to Cæsarea, across the beautiful plain of Sharon, bright with a thousand flowers of spring, the Apostle journeys. At Cæsarea he lingers till the very eve of the Feast, enjoying a few days of freedom and happy intercourse with those who must have been united to him by a strong bond of sympathy and friendship, for S. Philip the Evangelist, whose guest he was, had been the first to carry the Gospel to the Samaritans, and by baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch had been the means of introducing the Faith into that distant land (ch. viii. 5, 26-38). The family of the Evangelist were walking in their father's steps. His four daughters, despising the attractions of the world, had chosen the better part, and consecrated their lives to the special service of God and of His Church.

Those few days of spiritual rest and refreshment were interrupted by the arrival of Agabus, a disciple gifted with prophecy, who, in the early days of S. Paul's work at Antioch, had warned the Church of the coming famine (ch. xi. 28). Adopting the symbolic actions of the ancient prophets (Is. xx. 3 ; Jer xiii. 5 ; xix. 10, 11 ; Ezek. iv. 1-3 ; v. 1-4 ; 1 Kings, xxii. 11), Agabus takes up the Apostle's girdle, and binds his own hands and feet with it, saying, *'Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles'* (v. 11).

We can picture the sorrow of the little band at this solemn announcement. The intimation was clear and definite. A Jewish assault was to lead to a Roman imprisonment. Was it indeed God's will that so valuable a life should be surrendered? S. Luke and S. Timothy, his own companions, now join their tears and entreaties to those of the disciples at Cæsarea, beseeching him not to go up to Jerusalem. S. Paul was not insensible to their loving entreaties. *'What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart?'* was his touching answer.

'for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the LORD JESUS (v. 13). Nothing could weaken his determination, or turn him from his purpose, for the LORD JESUS was in all his thoughts; and though fully and vividly conscious of the sufferings that awaited him, yet, like his Master, he *'steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,'* rejoicing at being allowed to fill up the afflictions of CHRIST for His body's sake—the Church (Col. i. 24). When he would not be persuaded, his friends ceased their entreaties, saying, *'The will of the LORD be done.'* They felt that the Apostle was following a higher leading than theirs, and that CHRIST would strengthen His servant to do His will.

3. *The Reception at Jerusalem* (v. 15–19).

The quiet preparation time was ended. It was seventy-five miles, an ordinary three days' journey, from Cæsarea to Jerusalem. S. Paul and his companions took what was necessary for their journey, and, accompanied by some disciples from Cæsarea, and by Mnason of Cyprus, whose house at Jerusalem was to be placed at their disposal, they entered the Holy City, together with multitudes of Jews from all parts, who were streaming up to Jerusalem on the eve of the Feast.

How full of painful interest must Jerusalem have been to S. Paul! The school of Gamaliel, the synagogue of the Libertines, the house where the High Priest had given him his commission to Damascus, the spot where he had witnessed and shared in the martyrdom of S. Stephen—must all have stirred him with painful memories. Never probably had he trodden the streets of the Holy City with so deep a sadness as now. Bonds and afflictions he could meet joyfully; but his *'great heaviness'* and *'continual sorrow'* were caused by the thought of his brethren—his *'kinsmen according to the flesh'* (Rom. ix. 2, 3)—that great multitude who now filled the streets of Jerusalem, and who, in their blindness, would, he felt sure, reject that message of salvation he had come once more to offer.

Very gladly did the brethren at Mnason's house welcome the great Apostle, and accompany him the following day to the great assembly of the Elders, presided over by S. James, first Bishop of Jerusalem.

Probably there were not a few in that assembly who looked upon S. Paul, if not with dislike, yet with suspicion; they were jealous for the honour of the law, and the great Apostle had many bitter enemies at Jerusalem, who misrepresented his teaching, and asserted that he taught the foreign Jews not to circumcise their children, nor to walk in obedience to Jewish customs (v. 21). But as they listened to the history of God's blessing on his work, and heard of Churches founded and established in Greece and Asia, and saw Gentile converts from so many distant countries coming forward to offer the generous gifts of Gentile Churches to their poorer brethren in Jerusalem, their doubts and suspicions vanished; they saw the hand of God in all that had been done, and united in a solemn act of praise and thanksgiving to God for the wonders He had wrought.

4. *The Four Nazarites* (v. 20-26).

But though the Elders were satisfied of the falseness of the charges brought against S. Paul, the multitude of Jewish believers could not be so easily convinced. It was, therefore, considered advisable that S. Paul should give a public proof that he himself was an observer of the law by taking part in the ceremonies of a Nazarite vow.

A Jew who desired to show publicly his thankfulness for any special mercies, took the Nazarite vow for a certain specified time. The offerings required from a Nazarite before he could be freed from his vow were so costly, that it was often impossible for a poor man to procure them, and it was looked upon as an act of charity and piety for one who had means at his disposal to bear the expense entailed. The person who thus defrayed the expense was required to stay with the Nazarites, during an entire week,

in one of the chambers of the Temple, set apart for this purpose, and take part in all the ceremonies enjoined by Jewish customs on such occasions.

This, then, was the advice given and acted upon by S. Paul, who gladly consented to become as a Jew that he might gain the Jews (1 Cor. ix. 20-22), being ready to be made all things to all men, as long as it involved no compromise or contradiction of the great truths for which he was ready to lay down his life.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. A firm determination to go straight on in the path of duty, at whatever cost, prepared to meet whatever sufferings may be in store for us, praying only to be kept faithful to the end.

2. Never to sacrifice any portion of the truth, or be in any way untrue to our principles ; but in things indifferent, to be always ready to yield to others, if by so doing we may gain any to CHRIST.

3. There always have been, and always will be, differences of opinion even among the holiest men in the visible Church, but these differences of opinion on minor points should be looked upon as opportunities of exercising charity, patience, and forbearance, and not become causes of strife and dissension.

LESSON XLI.

The Tumult in the Temple.

Read Acts xxi. 27-40; xxii. Learn S. Matt. xxiii. 37-39; Heb. iii. 13.

1. *The Tumult* (ch. xxi. 27-30).

The seven days of purification were almost ended before any of S. Paul's enemies recognised him. Years of hardship and suffering had no doubt altered the features, and changed the appearance of the proud Pharisee of former years, who was once known as Saul the persecutor, and it was therefore hardly likely that his former companions would claim acquaintance with him. But there were others assembled at that time in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Pentecost, strangers from foreign cities, who knew him well, and who were his deadly enemies.

It was from this quarter that danger arose. Certain Jews from Asia, among whom perhaps was his old enemy Alexander the coppersmith, recognised him in the Temple, and immediately raised a tumult, loudly accusing him of setting all men everywhere against the people, and the Law, and the Temple; and, further, of actually polluting the Temple by bringing a Gentile within its sacred precincts—for having seen the Ephesian Trophimus with him in the city, they chose to conclude that he had accompanied S. Paul within the sacred enclosure of the Temple.

No accusation could have roused more effectually the fury of the Jews. To defile the Temple was what every enemy

of the Jews tried to do. Instantly the rumour spread throughout the city, that Paul the Apostle, the renegade Rabbi, who taught and wrote that Gentiles were as good as Jews, had been seen taking an uncircumcised Gentile within the sacred precincts. Even a Roman was forbidden on pain of death to set foot within the 'middle wall of partition, that low stone balustrade, on which was engraved the inscription in Greek and Latin, '*No alien must set foot within this enclosure on pain of certain death.*'

Here then was just the opportunity that was needed to take vengeance on the Apostle. The excited crowd were not likely to inquire whether the accusation were true or false. They rushed madly upon him, dragging him outside the Temple precincts, while the Levites, anxious to save the sacred enclosure from the stain of blood, shut the heavy gate behind the excited crowd.

Was this to be the end? Was the great Apostle to be torn in pieces and beaten to death by that wild savage crowd? Had not God heard the prayers of the Gentile Church (Acts xx. 36; xxi. 5; Rom. xv. 30, 31), and would He not deliver His faithful servant from so cruel a death?

Yes! God did hear and answer those prayers. S. Paul's mission was not yet accomplished; he had still to witness for the truth before rulers and kings.

2. *The Rescue* (ch. xxi. 31-40).

Suddenly there is heard the regular tramp of armed men, and the crowd are compelled to fall back, and give up their prisoner to a strong force of Roman soldiers, who, under the command of Lysias, the chief captain, have hastened down from the castle of Antonia, a strong fortress overlooking the Temple, to inquire into and put an end to this sudden and tumultuous outbreak.

Having rescued the prisoner from being beaten to death by the mob, and bound him with two chains as though he were some desperate criminal, the chief captain tries to discover the cause of the tumult, demanding who the

prisoner was, and what he had done. So great, however, was the uproar and din of voices, some crying one thing and some another, that the chief captain commanded the soldiers to carry the prisoner to the castle, a work of no small difficulty, for the mob in their fury pressed upon him, shouting, as on a former memorable occasion, '*Away with him*' (S. John xix. 15).

... Arrived at the summit of the stairs, there is a pause; the Apostle turns to the chief captain and begs to be allowed to address the clamorous mob. Up to this time the chief captain had supposed his prisoner to be a certain Egyptian, the leader of a lawless band of brigands and assassins who had stirred up sedition against the Roman Government; but when S. Paul explains that he is a Jew of Tarsus, a city remarkable for its culture, and allowed by the Romans to keep its own laws and magistrates, and moreover makes his request in the Greek language, he begins to think his prisoner must be entitled to some respect and consideration, and therefore grants his request.

It was a bold petition to come from one whose life had just been barely rescued from that raging mob, and most men under such circumstances would have desired nothing so much as to be hurried out of sight of the lawless multitude.

Not so S. Paul, for he could not forget that his would-be murderers were his '*kinsmen according to the flesh*,' redeemed by the precious blood of CHRIST, for whose sakes he would willingly lay down his life.

3. S. Paul's Defence (ch. xxii. 1-21).

See the great Apostle standing above that sea of heads, and, with outstretched arm, addressing the vast multitude. '*Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence.*' It was as though a spell had fallen on that noisy crowd. The din of voices is exchanged for breathless silence, the address is given in their own Hebrew tongue, the language they love. Oh, what if by the Spirit's power that listening multitude

should be won over to the faith, like the three thousand on the day of Pentecost !

He tries to gain them by disarming their prejudices, and correcting the wrong impressions they had received regarding himself. He tells them that he can entirely sympathize with them in this outburst of zeal, for he himself had once shared their convictions, and nothing short of a divine revelation had altered his religion and his life. He tells them that he was not merely a Jew, educated by no less a teacher than the great Gamaliel, but also one of the strictest of Pharisees, animated with as much zeal for God as they had showed that very day ; he tells them further how through this mistaken zeal he had persecuted even unto death, both men and women. He appeals to the High Priest and to the members of the Sanhedrim as witnesses of the commission they had given him to Damascus to carry on there his work of persecution. And then he tells the story of his conversion—the vision of JESUS of Nazareth which had changed the whole course of his life. He tells how Ananias, a *‘devout man according to the law,’* had healed his blindness ; he mentions his baptism and return to Jerusalem, and his vision while praying in the Temple ; the vision of the risen JESUS, bidding him hurry with all speed out of Jerusalem, because there they would not receive his testimony. He tells how he pleaded to be allowed to stay ; he speaks of his share in the martyrdom of S. Stephen—thus doing all in his power by a public confession to make reparation for his share in that awful sin—and how, notwithstanding his longing desire to plead with his fellow-countrymen, the command is clear and decisive, *‘Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles’* (v. 21).

4. *The Rage of the Jews* (ch. xxii. 22–30).

The hated word *Gentile* was more than the excited mob could bear. Up to this point they had listened with the *deepest* attention, but as soon as they heard that the Gentiles *were to be sharers* of God’s privileges on equal terms with *themselves*, they broke out into wild yells and passionate

exclamations ; ‘ *Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live* ’ (v. 22), and casting off their loose upper garments, they threw dust into the air, shouting and yelling at the prisoner in their impotent fury.

Unable to understand the cause of this fresh and violent outburst, the chief captain commanded that the prisoner should be brought into the castle, and put to the torture, until he should confess the crime of which he had been guilty. But as the soldiers stripped him, and bound him, like his Master, with leathern thongs to the pillar for the terrible Roman punishment of scourging, S. Paul turns to the centurion who stands by and asks, ‘ *Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned ?* ’ The centurion was alarmed, he bade the soldiers stop, and hurried off to the chief captain, bidding him take heed as to what he was doing, for it was forbidden under heavy penalty to scourge a Roman citizen.

The chief captain respected the claim ; he himself was not a Roman by birth, but had bought this privilege, and when S. Paul in answer to his question affirmed that he was free born, he bade the soldiers unloose him, and told the chief priests to summon next day a meeting of the Sanhedrim to try the prisoner. (On S. Paul’s claim to be treated as a Roman, see Lesson XXX.)

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. Every unheeded call, every rejection of God’s proffered grace, leaves the heart still harder than before. God’s spirit will not always strive with man ; we cannot tell how soon our day of grace may be over, or our opportunities taken from us never to return. ‘ *Behold now is the accepted time ; behold now is the day of salvation.* ’

2. To follow the example of our blessed LORD and the Saints, by trying to win over those who would persecute and injure us, and willingly to sacrifice ourselves for their sakes.

3. Never to form rash or hasty judgments, or allow ourselves to be led by prejudice or passion.

LESSON XLII.

8. Paul before the Sanhedrim.

Read Acts xxiii. 1-11. Learn Ps. xxxi. 22 ; xxxvii. 5.

1. *Before the Sanhedrim (v. 1-4).*

The chief priests have summoned a great meeting of the Sanhedrim to try the prisoner. The seventy-two learned men who compose that great Jewish council are sitting in a half-circle—the Scribes with their rolls of the law at either end.

The chief captain leads his prisoner in, and places him before them.

The Apostle gazes earnestly on the faces of those who compose the council. Once before he has been in that assembly, not as a prisoner, but sitting in judgment upon, and giving his vote against, the Church's first martyr, S. Stephen. Twenty-two years have passed since that event. Yet, among those judges who are now about to try him, he may have recognised more than one familiar face.

The prisoner begins his defence. '*Brethren, I have lived before GOD in all good conscience until this day*' (v. 1), as one, that is, sincerely desirous of obeying God's laws, and the dictates of his own conscience.

This bold assertion of innocence irritated the High Priest, Ananias, who was one of the worst tyrants and hypocrites ever raised to that dignity. With an utter disregard of the *principles of justice*, he bade the officers of the court smite **the prisoner on the mouth.**

Carried away, perhaps, for a moment by a feeling of righteous anger at so great an insult, the Apostle exclaims indignantly, '*God shall smite thee, thou whited wall*' (comp. S. Matt. xxiii. 27); fair to look upon, meaning the white robes belonging to his office, yet foul within, and destined to perish miserably, not many years after, by the dagger of an assassin.

The bystanders are startled at the boldness of the rebuke, and exclaim in astonishment, '*Revilest thou God's High Priest*' (v. 4)?

Some writers think that the rebuke was uttered by S. Paul as a prophecy which he was divinely commissioned to deliver. While others contrast it with the meek reply of our blessed SAVIOUR under similar circumstances, and standing, perhaps, on that very spot: '*If I have spoken evil, bear witness to the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me*' (S. John xviii. 22, 23)?

2. *The Strife of Tongues* (v. 5-11).

S. Paul's answer (v. 5) may either mean that he was unaware that he who had given the order was the high priest, or it may be an apology for a momentary outburst of anger. Then perceiving that some of his judges are Pharisees, and others Sadducees, he exclaims—'*Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question*' (v. 6).

This appeal to the Pharisees against the Sadducees was a skilful device to secure his own safety. S. Paul had come to Jerusalem hoping to persuade the better portion of his countrymen that the Gospel was really the fulfilment of the law; and, by showing how much they held in common, he hoped to gain over the nobler spirits among his judges to accept the truths of the Gospel. Any appeal to the Sadducees would have been useless, for they disbelieved in a future existence, and there was, therefore, no common ground of faith on which they could meet.

The effect of this appeal was instantaneous. The

assembly was divided. There rose a sudden hubbub of angry voices; the Scribes who sided with the Pharisees started up in a body, proclaiming the innocence of the Apostle, but their words were cut short by the opposite party, and so violent was the tumult, that the chief captain, seeing that his prisoner was again in danger of being torn in pieces, ordered his troops to rescue him a second time from the hands of his infuriated countrymen and bring him into the castle.

3. *The Still Small Voice* (v. 11).

That night, as he lay sleepless on a soldier's pallet, the Apostle was cheered by a glorious Vision. The same Lord who had already appeared to him on the road to Damascus (ch. ix. 5), in the Temple (ch. xxii. 17, 18), and at Corinth (ch. xviii. 9), again stood by his side. '*Be of good cheer, Paul,*' whispered the still small Voice, '*for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome*' (v. 11).

S. Paul may well have been weary, cast down and disappointed at the events of the previous day. He had longed to conciliate the Jews, and his efforts had been a failure; he had only been saved from being torn in pieces by them through the interference of the Roman commander. He had ardently desired to visit the Church at Rome (ch. xix. 21; Rom. i. 11-13), and he finds himself a prisoner at Jerusalem. Oh, how this Vision and this Voice must have cheered and strengthened him! for still it called him westward, and assured him that his one longing desire should be fulfilled, and that he should yet witness for his Master in the great capital of the world.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. All we have to do is simply to carry out the work God gives us from one day to another, leaving results with Him. No faithful effort is unseen or unrewarded, and,

though our work may appear to be a failure, yet nothing undertaken and carried on for the love of God, and in obedience to His will, can really fail, or lose its reward.

2. If we wish to hear the still small voice of JESUS, we must go apart from the world and its tumult, and seek it in silence and prayer, and that Voice will whisper Peace! and will bring pardon, strength, and comfort to our troubled souls.

3. God will fulfil His gracious purposes in His own time and way, for with Him all things are possible.

‘ When obstacles and trials seem
Like prison-walls to be,
I do the little I can do,
And leave the rest to Thee.’

LESSON XLIII.

The Forty Conspirators.

Read Acts xxiii. 12-35. Learn Ps. xxvii. 1-3; Heb. xii. 22-24.

1. *A Brave Youth* (v. 12-22).

The next day brought with it a fresh peril. So inflamed with rage were S. Paul's enemies at being disappointed of their victim, that no less than forty Jews bound themselves by a terrible oath, that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed him.

But how were they to carry out their design? The prisoner was out of their reach, in a Roman fortress, guarded by Roman soldiers. Satan is ever ready to suggest some wicked scheme to those whose hearts are set on evil. They will have recourse to a lie in order to carry out their plan. So these forty assassins go boldly to the chief priests and elders who are of the Sadducees' party, and propose to them to become accomplices in the murder.

They are to request the chief captain to bring the Apostle once more before the Sanhedrim, under pretence of a renewed inquiry into his case, and once outside the strong walls of the fortress, the assassins undertake to lay an ambush and slay him.

Far from rejecting with scorn so iniquitous a proposal, *the chief priests* and scribes accept it as eagerly as they had *accepted the offer* of Judas to betray his Master. But a ~~man~~ *not* known to so many was hard to conceal. The design

came to the knowledge of S. Paul's nephew, a young man who had probably come to Jerusalem for the Feast, and he succeeded in gaining access to his uncle and informing him of the plot.

There was no time to lose. S. Paul sends at once for one of the centurions of the garrison, and requests him to take the youth without delay to the chief captain, as he had something of importance to tell him.

It was a bold request to come from a Jewish prisoner, but S. Paul, as a Roman citizen, was entitled to the respect of the Roman authorities, and the centurion at once did as he was desired.

The Jewish boy, as he accompanied the centurion, would need to summon up all his courage, both on account of the peril he incurred from his own countrymen, should suspicion light on him, and also because he was about to be brought into the presence of the most powerful person in Jerusalem, the representative of Roman authority.

The Roman commandant was evidently well disposed towards his prisoner; he received the youth kindly, took him aside, and listened to his story, and then dismissed him, cautioning him to tell no one that he had revealed the plot.

2. *The Ride to Cæsarea* (v. 23, 24; 31-33).

Lysias was probably glad of an excuse for getting rid of one who was so obnoxious to his own countrymen, and to whom he was, at the same time, obliged to show the deference due to a Roman citizen. As soon as the youth had departed, he summoned two centurions, and commanded them to convey the prisoner safely to Cæsarea, and deliver him over to Felix, the Roman governor.

At nine o'clock that same evening, when it was dark, and the streets were deserted, a strong escort of four hundred and seventy soldiers left Jerusalem with the prisoner, and, marching all night, reached Antipatris, forty-two miles from Jerusalem, before daybreak. Here they rested, and the following morning four hundred soldiers returned to

Jerusalem, leaving a guard of seventy horsemen to escort the Apostle the remaining twenty-six miles to Cæsarea.

So large a body of horsemen entering Cæsarea in broad daylight must have attracted considerable notice. Perhaps among the passers-by were some of those disciples who a few days before had parted with so many tears from their beloved teacher. Now they see their worst forebodings realised as he rides through their streets, a prisoner, his right hand chained to the arm of a horseman, and guarded by a strong escort from the Roman fortress of Antonia.

3. *The Letter to Felix* (v. 25-30 ; 34, 35).

The centurion and his prisoner were at once introduced into the presence of Felix, and the letter which Lysias had sent with the prisoner was handed to the governor. The chief captain had not written a very exact report of all that had happened. He says nothing of his own illegal conduct in binding a Roman citizen with the intention of scourging him, but claims credit for interfering in his behalf, and rescuing a Roman citizen from danger. He tells Felix that having discovered that the outcry of the Jews against the prisoner had been caused by certain questions relating to their law, and that, though he had done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment, yet the Jews were plotting against his life, he had sent the prisoner to him, implying that he, as governor, was a fitter person than himself to deal with the case ; and added that he had told his accusers to go down to Cæsarea and say what they had against him.

Felix read the letter, and after inquiring of what province the prisoner was, he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment-hall (probably one of the guard-rooms attached to the palace), until his accusers should arrive.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. *God often chooses the most unlikely instruments to carry out His designs.* The deeply-laid plot of the Sanhedrim,

the highest council in Jerusalem, and the determination of forty assassins to murder S. Paul, were defeated through the instrumentality of a Jewish boy.

2. To be brave and prompt in action when the opportunity is given us of serving God, or benefiting others, laying aside all thoughts of possible consequences to ourselves.

3. We are citizens of a greater city than Rome, Jerusalem which is above; we are subjects of the King of Kings, fellow-citizens of angels and saints, heirs of a glorious kingdom which shall have no end. Do we value our privileges? Do we thank God day by day for giving us so glorious an inheritance, and do we keep the commandments of our King and of His holy Church?

did, all that was written in the Law and the Prophets, and believing, as the greater part of his own nation did, in a resurrection of the just and unjust. In this faith it had always been his aim to keep his conscience clear, '*void of offence towards God and towards man.*' A man who lived for such an aim was not likely to be a mover of sedition or a profaner of the Temple.

To show the utter falsehood of this third and last charge, he states that, after being absent many years, he had come to Jerusalem with alms for the poor of his people, and offerings for the Temple, and far from having any intention of profaning its sacred precincts, he was actually engaged in one of its strictest ceremonies at the time of his arrest.

The Apostle concludes his defence by appealing to the well-known principle of the Roman law, that the accusers should be those who had seen the offence committed. If those Asiatic Jews who had stirred up the tumult could not be produced as witnesses, he called upon his accusers themselves to state the result of his trial before the Sanhedrim, or to bring forward a single fact against him, unless it were his exclamation concerning the resurrection of the dead.

2. *Conscience Unheeded* (v. 22-27).

Felix cannot condemn S. Paul. From his long residence in Cæsarea, probably also from his connection with Drusilla, who was a Jewish Princess, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I., he had a more accurate knowledge of '*that way*,' the Christian religion, than the Jews and their advocate supposed.

But if he would not condemn him, neither would he release him, and the Apostle was given into the charge of a centurion and allowed as much indulgence as the rules of *military custody* permitted, particularly the important privilege of being visited by his friends. The Roman *governor* appears to have been greatly interested in his *prisoner*. Perhaps those words about the resurrection of

the just and of the unjust had made him feel uneasy, and he would like to hear more concerning this new belief. So on his return to Cæsarea with his wife Drusilla, Felix summoned the Apostle into his presence and bade him discourse to them of the faith of CHRIST.

We can picture the scene. Felix and Drusilla sitting in state, with their guards and officers around them, while the prisoner stands before them, with the chains on his wrists. S. Paul was well aware of the character of those to whom he was speaking, and of the crimes of which they were guilty. He tries to convince them of sin, that they may be led to repentance. As he tells of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, the conscience of Felix is aroused; he looks back upon the guilty past, and trembles. He had been a slave, and when raised to power he had made himself hated for his cruelty and oppression. He had procured the murder of the High Priest to gratify his personal revenge; he had enriched himself by taking bribes for the release of prisoners; he had persuaded Drusilla to leave her husband and become his wife. Well may he be terrified when he thinks of death, and after death—the judgment.

But conviction of sin did not in his case lead to repentance. He crushes the rising thought, he silences the voice of conscience: '*Go thy way for this time,*' he cries; '*when I have a convenient season I will call thee unto me*' (v. 25). That '*convenient season*' never came. Felix's rule lasted two years longer. Such was the long-suffering of God even towards this wicked man (S. Luke, xiii. 8, 9). Two years of wasted opportunities, during which he sent often for the Apostle and communed with him, vainly hoping that S. Paul would offer him a bribe for his release, for he had heard him speak of the contributions he had gathered for the Jews in Jerusalem, and probably could not understand how one who could raise money for the needs of others, should not do so for his own freedom.

Yet, though Felix wasted his opportunity, and lost his day of grace, S. Paul's labour was not thrown away, for the

history of this wicked ruler has been a warning to many, and his impenitence has led many to repent.

It is probably to S. Paul's two years' imprisonment at Cæsarea that we owe S. Luke's Gospel, which was composed under his superintendence, and also the Acts of the Apostles, for during this time he was allowed a certain amount of liberty; his friends and acquaintances had free access to him, and his imprisonment, therefore, far from hindering God's work, contributed greatly to the furtherance of the Gospel, and must have been to the Apostle himself a time of rest and spiritual refreshment sorely needed to restore his broken health, and refresh his weary spirit.

After two years were ended, Felix was recalled to Rome, to answer certain charges brought against him of having allowed his soldiers to plunder and massacre the Jews of Cæsarea. Felix, desiring to gain favour with the Jews, and to blunt their anger against himself, committed a last act of injustice and oppression by leaving the Apostle in bonds, in order to gratify their malice, and to give to his successor the impression that he was deserving of punishment. Perhaps this was the last drop in the overflowing cup of his iniquity. History is silent as to the close of the life of this wicked man. He was saved from the punishment his crimes deserved through the influence of his brother, Pallas, but though he was neither banished nor put to death, he was forced to give up the greater portion of his ill-gotten wealth. Drusilla, with her son Agrippa, both perished in the eruption of Vesuvius, nineteen years afterwards.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. Conscience is the voice of God speaking in our soul. We must listen to that voice and obey it. Those who, like Felix, stifle the voice of conscience, become at last like Drusilla, '*past feeling*' (Eph. iv. 19), that is to say, by hardening their hearts, they become so deaf to the voice of conscience that at last it ceases to speak. But there will come a time when conscience will make itself heard, no longer to warn, but to condemn (Prov. i. 24-31).

2. The Holy Spirit will not always strive with man. We must make the most of present opportunities and means of grace, and take heed lest we '*grieve*' (Eph. iv. 30), '*resist*' (Acts vii. 51), or finally '*quench*' (1 Thess. v. 19) His holy inspirations.

3. To keep our conscience '*void of offence*' is the hardest thing in the world. We should examine ourselves daily, asking for the light of the Holy Spirit, to show us our sins against God and against one another; the good that we have left undone as well as the evil we have done, never weary of fighting against sin, always watching and praying that we may overcome it.

4. Those things which appear to hinder God's work are made by Him instrumental in carrying out His designs, and displaying His wisdom, power, and love.

'Ill that He blesses is our good,
And unblest good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be His sweet will.'

NOTE.—During the two years of S. Paul's detention at Cæsarea, he was under *military custody*, as distinguished from *public custody*, which was confinement in a common gaol (as at Philippi), and from *free custody*, a very mild form of detention, only permitted to men of high rank. In the

case of *military custody*, the prisoner was kept always chained by his right hand to the left hand of a soldier, who was responsible for the safety of his charge, and incurred death if he escaped. Sometimes under this guard a prisoner was allowed to live at a private house, as S. Paul did at Rome (Acts xxviii. 16, 20, 30). Though Felix gave S. Paul as much liberty as the rules of military custody allowed, and permitted him to be visited by his friends, it is clear that the '*chain*' was not dispensed with (ch. xxiv. 27 ; xxv. 14 ; xxvi. 29).

LESSON XLV.

The Appeal to Cæsar.

Read Acts xxv. 1-22. Learn Dan. vii. 9, 10; Rev. xx. 11, 12.

1. *A Fresh Conspiracy* (vv. 1-5).

As soon as Festus, the new governor, arrived, the Jews renewed their efforts to procure the death of S. Paul. A deputation of the chief personages in Jerusalem, headed by the High Priest, waited upon him, renewing all their former charges, and entreating him to allow the prisoner to be brought from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, that he might once more be tried by the Sanhedrim.

The cruelty and cunning of these Jewish rulers had not abated during S. Paul's two years' imprisonment, and had the governor granted their request, hired assassins were ready to waylay and murder him on the road.

But the character of Festus was far higher than that of Felix. He would not stain his hand with bribes, or commit a crime to win popularity. He bade the High Priest and his party return with him to Cæsarea, and there lodge their complaints against the prisoner, reminding them that it was not the custom of the Romans to grant any person's life to his accusers by way of favour, as they wished him to do, but

to place the accused and accusers face to face, that the accused might have every opportunity of self-defence.

2. *S. Paul before Festus* (vv. 6-12).

Foiled in their attempt at assassination, the enemies of S. Paul organised a powerful deputation to carry out the accusation. The new governor did not keep them waiting. The very day after his return to Cæsarea, he took his seat on the tribunal to hear the case.

During the two years S. Paul's imprisonment had lasted, we may be sure that his enemies would have gathered up every rumour, which might possibly serve as an accusation against him; and now '*many and grievous*' were the charges brought against him by the Jews, not one of which could, however, be proved.

S. Paul met their angry accusations with calm denials. There were no proofs, no witnesses against him; he had not offended either against the law of the Jews, nor against the Temple, nor yet against Cæsar.

Festus saw at once that the prisoner had been guilty of no crime punishable by Roman law. The whole question in his eyes was one that concerned Jewish belief, and, wishing to put an end to the scene, he turned to the prisoner, and asked him whether he was willing to go up to Jerusalem, and be tried before the Sanhedrim under his protection. But S. Paul knew well that he had far more chance of justice at the hands of the Romans than from his own countrymen. Jewish tribunals had invariably condemned him, and five times already he had been rescued from their savage cruelty by Roman interference, and the justice of Roman laws. He felt that his course was not yet run. God had still work for him to do. His mission to Rome must yet be accomplished. Moved doubtless by an inward inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he determines to use his privilege as a *Roman citizen*, and to appeal to Cæsar. He asserts his **innocence** towards the Jews (v. 10); if he has been guilty of

any crime, it is Rome, and not Jerusalem, that should judge him. If he is guilty, he refuses not to die; but, if he is innocent of the accusations brought against him, no man may deliver him into the hands of his enemies. He concludes his reply with the sudden exclamation, '*I appeal unto Cæsar*' (v. 11).

The appeal took Festus by surprise. He had probably meant well and kindly by his prisoner, and now the whole case was taken out of his hands, and he must of necessity send the prisoner to Rome without being able to state any crime of which he had been guilty.

He held a short consultation with his council, but such an appeal once made could not be set aside. The right of appeal to the Emperor was one of the most important of the privileges of a Roman citizen, and no governor or magistrate could detain one who claimed to exercise it. To Rome the prisoner must go, to be judged by the Emperor himself. (Cæsar was not a proper name, but the title given to the Emperors of Rome. The Cæsar to whom S. Paul appealed was Nero.)

3. *A Royal Visit* (vv. 13-22).

Some days would probably pass before there was an opportunity of sending S. Paul to Rome. A ship must be provided, and a definite charge drawn up to send to the Emperor with the prisoner, explaining the circumstances and nature of the case.

Festus found it extremely perplexing to write this charge: he could not make out why the Jews showed such hatred towards the prisoner, or what he had done to provoke their hostility. He was therefore very glad that the visit of King Herod Agrippa, who came with his sister Bernice, to pay their respects to the new Roman governor, gave him an opportunity of asking his advice concerning the prisoner.

This King Agrippa was the son of him who had put S. James to death, and S. Peter in prison, and who had after-

wards perished so miserably (Acts xii. 20 23). He reigned only over the northern parts of his father's kingdom, and was but the shadow of a king, his power depending on the will of the Roman Emperor. The guardianship of the Temple with its sacred robes was committed to him, and also the right of nominating to the high-priesthood. But though nominally a king, he was merely a puppet in the hands of the Romans, and so entirely devoted to their interests, that he took part with them in the final siege against Jerusalem.

Agrippa was accompanied by his sister Bernice, who, like his other sister, Drusilla, was very beautiful, but an extremely wicked woman.

Festus told the king his perplexity concerning the prisoner, and of the fury which seemed to inspire the whole Jewish people at the mention of his name. He told him how the real question at issue turned on some point of Jewish law and doctrine, and upon certain questions concerning '*one JESUS, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive*' (v. 19).

Agrippa being well acquainted with the Jewish religion, and with their laws and customs, was much interested, and was curious to see the prisoner himself, a desire which Festus willingly granted.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. We should often thank God that we live under the protection of just laws and a good government, and pray frequently for all in authority, for the powers that be are ordained by God (Rom. xiii. 1).

2. To pay but little heed to the world's judgment, or the world's opinion on our actions, but to be always looking forward to, and preparing for the great judgment, when we shall stand before Him who sits on the great white Throne, *from whose just judgment there is no appeal.*

3. *Festus considered the question of 'one JESUS which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive,' to be of no moment,*

yet upon that truth depends the salvation of mankind ; and in like manner, Satan would persuade us to treat with indifference and neglect, the things which concern our eternal salvation, for the sake of the cares or the pleasures of this passing world.

4. The pomp and grandeur of this world is but a vain and passing shadow, the greatest earthly empires decay ; but the Church, though opposed and persecuted by the world in every age, shall triumph over her enemies and endure for ever.

LESSON XLVI.

Brought before Rulers and Kings.

Read Acts xxv. 23-27; xxvi. *Learn* 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4, 17, 18.

A Brilliant Assemblage (ch. xxv. 23.)

A brilliant throng is assembled in the audience chamber of the palace at Cæsarea. Festus has, we may be sure, entertained his royal visitors with much pomp; feasts, processions, military shows have been held in their honour, but the object of this splendid gathering is a far different one. King Agrippa has expressed a wish to see and hear the remarkable prisoner who has caused such a stir among the Jewish people, and Festus, glad to gratify the king's desire, has invited all the chief people of Cæsarea, and the officers of the army to be present.

We can picture the scene. The Roman governor in his robes of office, his body-guard in attendance, standing behind the gilded chairs that have been placed for Festus and his distinguished guests.

Agrippa and Bernice have come in state (v. 23), dressed in royal purple, wearing their crowns and jewels, and attended by a train of followers in gorgeous apparel, after the manner of Eastern courts.

As Agrippa took his seat, did he realise how closely the faith in that '*one JESUS*' was already linked with the destinies of his house? Did he think of his great-grandfather Herod, who massacred the holy Innocents; or of his great-uncle, who murdered S. John Baptist, and mocked the Saviour of the world; or of his father, who, to please the

Jews, gave to S. James the crown of martyrdom, and would have slain S. Peter also? Did he recall the fact that each had died, or been disgraced, as a direct consequence of these cruelties? Probably his mind was too full of gratified vanity to dwell for a moment on such dark memories. He and Bernice take their seats by the side of the governor, and, at his command, the poor worn prisoner, with chains on his wrists, his face furrowed with the marks of suffering and hardship, is introduced into the midst of that brilliant throng.

2. *Not disobedient unto the Heavenly Vision* (ch. xxv. 24 ; xxvi. 1-23).

Festus opened the proceedings by introducing the prisoner to the king, as one against whom the Jews were greatly enraged, though, as far as he could judge, he had been guilty of no crime. Since, however, he was a Roman citizen, and had exercised his privilege as such, of appealing to Cæsar, it was necessary to send with him some explanation of the case, and being perplexed as to what he ought to say, he was glad of this opportunity of bringing him before King Agrippa, as one likely to be able to help him in this difficulty.


Then the king, turning to the prisoner, said, '*Thou art permitted to speak for thyself*'; and, stretching forth his hand, after the manner of ancient orators, the Apostle again pleads his Master's cause before these kings and rulers, and great ones of the earth.

Once more he tells the story of his own early life ; once a strict Pharisee, looking forward in common with his nation to the coming of the promised Messiah, and believing that he was doing God service by hating and persecuting the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Then he tells the familiar story of his conversion from darkness to light, by means of that wondrous noonday vision outside the gates of Damascus, when the risen Jesus had appeared to him, convincing him *that He was indeed the Messiah*, and giving to him the

solemn commission to make known to all men, both Jews and Gentiles, what he had seen and heard, that they might be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that by faith in the risen Saviour they might receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among the saints.

He had not been disobedient to that heavenly vision. In the discharge of the commission so solemnly entrusted to him, he had preached repentance and conversion towards God, both among Jews and Gentiles. For this cause it was that the Jews had seized him in the Temple, and had tried to kill him, though in preaching the death and resurrection of the Messiah he was uttering no blasphemy, but simply witnessing to the fulfilment of that which had been foretold by Moses and the prophets.

3. *Blinded minds and hardened hearts* (ch. xxvi. 24-32).

The proud Roman, and the pleasure-loving king, had listened attentively to S. Paul's eloquent address. But suddenly Festus interrupts him. This tale of visions and revelations, and ancient prophecies, and of a Jewish prophet crucified by Pilate many years before, yet now declared to be risen from the dead, and to have power to forgive sins, and enlighten the darkness of Jew and Gentile, must be the outcome of an excited brain—the raving of a lunatic. 'Paul, thou art mad,' he exclaims, in a loud voice. Much learning, continual study, has, he supposes, turned his brain. 'I am not mad, most noble Festus,' is the calm and dignified reply, 'but speak forth the words of truth and soberness' (v. 25). Then, turning to the king, he makes an earnest appeal; he had read Moses and the Prophets—he must have heard from many witnesses, at least, some of the facts to which S. Paul had referred, for they had not been done in a corner, but had caused intense excitement throughout the whole country. 'King Agrippa!' he exclaims, 'believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest' (v. 27). But the only answer is the jeering remark, 'With  little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian.'

The very idea would appear supremely ludicrous to the pleasure-loving king and his gay courtiers. That *he*, a king, the friend and favourite of the Roman Emperor, should renounce the honours, riches, and pleasures of the world, to become the despised follower of a crucified Messiah! Such an idea could not be entertained for a moment.

'Would to God,' was the earnest reply, *'that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day were such as I am, except these bonds'* (v. 29).

Surely all present must have honoured and admired that persecuted prisoner, who, in the happiness of a firm faith and a peaceful conscience, could tell them how he prayed that all those princely and distinguished people could be, even such as he; while in the spirit of entire forgiveness, he desired that the sharing in his faith might involve no share in his sorrows and misfortunes.

The assembly broke up. The prisoner might be an inspired enthusiast, but it was clear he was no criminal. All present pronounced him innocent, and declared him to be undeserving of death or imprisonment. But his appeal to Cæsar prevented the governor from setting him free. He could neither punish nor release him. To Rome he must go, but it is probable that his mild imprisonment on his arrival in that city was owing to the proceedings of that day, for even Nero could not condemn to death one whom Felix, and Lysias, and Festus, and Agrippa, and even the Jewish Sanhedrim had pronounced innocent of any crime.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. S. Paul could affirm boldly that he was *'not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.'* It was the aim and motto of his life. We, too, with the eye of faith have seen the risen Saviour, and have heard His voice. To each He has given a distinct commission to work for Him in some special way. Is the heavenly mission ever before us? Are we ready to surrender everything that prevents our fulfilling what we

know to be His will for us? Can we bear ridicule or persecution joyfully for His sake?

2. Satan blinds the soul in many ways, sometimes by unbelief, hardness of heart and indifference to religion, as with Festus; sometimes by love of pleasure, as with Herod Agrippa. We should pray earnestly for ourselves and for others, that this darkness may give way to the '*light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of JESUS CHRIST*' (2 Cor. iv. 6).

3. How God loves the souls of men. He wills not the death of the sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. He sends S. John Baptist to Herod; He goes Himself to Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate; He strives even to the last with Judas; he sends S. Paul to Felix and Drusilla, to Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice—yet His Spirit will not always strive with man, and opportunities neglected, or turned into fresh occasions of sin, will rise up in the judgment to increase the condemnation of the sinner, for '*unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required*' (S. Luke xii. 48).

NOTE.—The words '*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,*' do not represent the original accurately. The remark was a scornful one on the part of Agrippa, who jeeringly asked if the prisoner expected him to forfeit his rank and royal title to become a disciple of the despised Nazarene—a companion of an outcast like himself?

CHRIST gave an Apostolic commission to S. Paul at his conversion (ch. xxvi. 17); but he was not ordained and enabled, through the laying on of hands, to execute the apostolic office till some years afterwards (ch. xiii. 2, 3). In like manner the other Apostles received an apostolic commission from CHRIST to go into all the world after His resurrection, but they were commanded by Him to tarry in Jerusalem until they were empowered by the HOLY GHOST to enter upon their office (S. Luke xxiv. 49; Acta i. 4-8).

LESSON XLVII.

The Voyage.

Read Acts xxvii. 1-29. Learn Psalm xxvii. 8-10 ; Isaiah xliii. 1-2.

1. *A Fair Start* (v. 1-5).

Festus soon found an opportunity of sending S. Paul with other prisoners to Rome, under the care of Julius, a centurion 'of the Augustan band,' probably some picked troops usually attached to the Emperor's person, but who may have been sent to Syria on some special service.

It was now late in August, and the time was rapidly approaching, when in ancient times, navigation was closed for the year. As every day the weather became more uncertain, and the voyage more perilous, and there was no vessel at Cæsarea bound for Italy, Julius embarked his prisoners on board a coasting vessel, bound for Adramyttium, a port in Mysia, near Troas. This vessel would touch at the chief ports in the west of Asia, and there would be no difficulty in finding a vessel at Ephesus, or some nearer port, which would carry them to their destination.

The ancient merchant ships of the Mediterranean were large vessels, built with one tall mast, and a huge sail fastened to an enormous yard, which could be raised or lowered. They were steered by paddle-rudders, one on either side, with a small sail abaft to help the steering. Their voyages were usually along the coast, and as they had neither compass nor charts to direct them, navigation was if possible suspended during the winter months, when many days and nights might pass with neither sun, moon, nor stars to guide their course.

Picture the Apostle leaving the military barracks at Cæsa-rea, and embarking at last for Rome. How little he expected, when he prayed so earnestly to see Rome, that he would enter it as a prisoner. But he has Christ's sure promise to cheer him; prisoner though he may be, he is on his way to witness for Him at Rome (ch. xxiii. 11). The Apostle is not alone: his faithful friends S. Luke and Aristarchus are among the passengers.

The voyage began prosperously. The day after they started they reached the harbour of Sidon, a distance of sixty-seven miles from Cæsarea. Here Julius, the centurion, who was evidently very kindly disposed towards his prisoner, gave S. Paul leave to land and visit the little Christian community in that place. What a privilege for that little band of Christians to see once more their beloved teacher, and to be allowed to minister to his necessities (v. 3).

After leaving Sidon, they coasted northward, till the mountains of Cilicia, S. Paul's native country, rose before them; while on their left they could see the island of Cyprus, the starting point of his great missionary career. Contrary winds compelled them to sail between Cyprus and the mainland, instead of taking the direct route to the south of the island, the course by which S. Paul sailed from Patara to Tyre (ch. xxi. 3) (see map). On leaving Cyprus, they were able, by the aid of land-breezes and westward currents, to cross the sea which washes the coasts of Cilicia and Pamphylia, and to reach Myra, a sea-port of Lycia.

2. *Contrary winds* (vv. 6-12). At Myra the centurion finds a large ship from Alexandria carrying corn to Italy. Probably she had been driven out of her course by the same winds which had hindered their own vessel. He eagerly seized the opportunity, and transferred his prisoners to this vessel, together with the soldiers, and such passengers as chose to accompany them.

~~And~~ by head-winds, it took several weary days to

reach Cnidus, a famous sea-port town ; a voyage which in fair weather would not have taken above four-and-twenty hours. Unable, on account of the wind, to enter its harbour, they were now compelled to take a southward course, and get under the lee of the large island of Crete. To reach Cape Salmone at the eastern end of the island was comparatively easy, but when they had rounded it, they had the utmost difficulty in coasting along the shore to Fair Havens, a small port near the little town of Lasea. Here they were obliged to put in, and wait for a change of wind.

Time passed, and still the wind remained in the same quarter. It was now the end of September. The Fast-day, or Great Day of Atonement, had passed, and the Jewish season of navigation was over, but other nations did not consider the sea closed until the first week in November. A discussion took place as to whether they should winter where they were, or push on to Phenice (Port Phoenix), thirty-four miles beyond. S. Paul, prisoner though he was, was asked his opinion, and strongly advised them to remain where they were (v. 10). His opinion was entitled to great weight, for his many voyages had shown him the dangers of a sea in which he had already been thrice shipwrecked, and had once floated for a night and a day (2 Cor. xi. 25). But the captain and the owner of the vessel gave their opinion the other way. Fair Havens, though affording a shelter from the north-west wind, was not a convenient harbour to winter in, while Port Phoenix, which could be reached in a few hours' sail, was safe in all weathers, besides being a far more desirable place for three hundred people to pass the winter in, than the obscure and lonely Fair Havens.

3. *The Tempest* (vv. 13-20).

It is not surprising that the centurion should have decided on following the opinion of the captain and owner of the ship, notwithstanding the warnings of Paul, the prisoner.

In a few days, a south breeze springing up, they gladly weighed anchor, and, hoisting their mainsail, left the port which had sheltered them.

Suddenly, without a moment's warning, a furious gale from the mountains smote the hapless vessel, and drove her out to sea. The suddenness and fury of the storm was such, that the sailors had not a moment to furl the mainsail or do anything, but leave the ship to be driven madly forward by the gale, till they neared the little island of Claudia, where, taking advantage of the partial shelter afforded by the island, they made preparations for weathering the storm.

With much difficulty they hoisted their boat on board, they then strengthened the vessel by *undergirding* it, passing ropes round the hull to keep the planks from starting, and lastly they lowered the yard and took in sail. Still the storm increased in fury, compelling them the next day to throw overboard everything that could be spared to lighten the ship, and on the third day to employ all hands in heaving overboard the huge mainyard and rigging. The unfortunate vessel was now reduced to the condition of a leaky and dismantled hulk, swept from stem to stern by the dashing spray, and drifting no one knew whither, under a leaden and moonless sky.

For a whole fortnight they thus drifted ; two hundred and seventy-six souls in an apparently fast-sinking vessel—perfectly helpless—tossed up and down on the waves—no means of cooking any food, all the utensils probably swept away by the storm ; and with death staring them in the face no one cared to eat, or had the heart to make any further effort to save the ship.

4. *The Vision* (vv. 21-29).

But while the sailors despaired, the Apostle prayed to Him who holds the waves in the hollow of His hand, and his prayer was heard. That night the Angel of God stood by him, saying, '*Fear not, Paul, thou must stand before Cæsar ; and lo God hath given thee all them that sail with thee*' (v. 24).

Perhaps the light of that vision was still on his face

when at daybreak he gathered the crew around him, and, after gently reproaching them with having rejected the advice which would have saved them from all that buffeting and loss, he told them of his vision, and of the Divine assurance that, though their ship must be lost, yet in answer to his prayer, they should all be saved, and should be cast upon a certain island.

All present felt the influence of that mysterious Jewish prisoner, and were inspired with fresh hope. After tossing hither and thither a whole fortnight at the mercy of the waves; about midnight the sailors, probably hearing the sound of breakers, rightly imagined they were nearing land. They sounded, and found they were in twenty fathoms of water. Again they dropped the lead into the seething waves, and this time found that there were but fifteen fathoms. Then, fearing lest they should be dashed upon the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern of the vessel, and watched anxiously for the first gleam of morning light.

How terribly long must have seemed the hours of that wintry night to that storm-tossed crew, with what appeared to be certain death staring them in the face.

The waves broke over them—the leak constantly gained upon them—at any moment the vessel might sink. But an unseen Hand protected them; they owed the preservation of their lives to the prayer of the Jewish prisoner, the intercession of a saint.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. To pray often for those in peril on the sea—‘Deliver them, O LORD, out of their distress, and bring them into the haven where they would be.’

2. We should be careful not to reject good advice. Had the captain and the centurion followed S. Paul’s advice, they would have escaped the storm and the shipwreck. We must *never put ourselves in the way of temptation, or think we*

can take care of ourselves, and disregard the warnings of those in authority over us.

3. Sometimes our spiritual life is overclouded by some long continued trial. As in S. Paul's voyage, neither sun nor stars for many days appeared, so there is a darkness which comes over the soul, the hiding of God's Face—some trouble of mind, caused perhaps by past sin (v. 21). Yet if we turn to God in prayer and humble repentance, He will bid us be of good cheer, and help us to bear whatever trouble our sins have brought upon us.

4. The sailors strengthened the vessel in the storm by fastening ropes round her, and we must strengthen ourselves in our temptations and difficulties by making good resolutions. It did not matter how often the ropes broke if the sailors knotted them up again, so when we break our good resolutions, we must join them again with prayer. (Give examples, such as regularity and reverence in prayer, silence under provocation, &c.)

LESSON XLVIII.

The Shipwreck.

Read Acts xxvii. 30 ; xxviii. 1-11. *Learn* S. Matt. xxiv. 13 ; 1 Cor. x. 13.

1. *A fresh danger* (ch. xxvii. 30-32).

Gradually day dawned upon the miserable crew, and enabled them to discover that they were anchored off a low point, over which a furious surf was breaking.

The selfish heathen sailors now made an attempt to escape in the boat, and leave the rest to their fate, but from this danger the passengers were saved by the energy and courage of S. Paul. Seeing at once through their base design, he turned to the centurion and said, '*Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved.*' Though God had revealed to S. Paul that all should be saved, yet every human effort was still to be made, and the skill of the sailors must be exerted to carry out what God had promised. The soldiers on board, on hearing S. Paul's remark, cut the rope which fastened the boat to the vessel and let her fall away.

2. *Strength and Refreshment* (ch. xxvii. 33-37).

The Apostle's next care was to persuade all on board to take a regular meal, to strengthen them for the exertion it would be necessary to make before they could reach the land. Repeating his assurance that not a hair of their head should perish, he himself set the example, breaking bread and giving thanks to God, in presence of them all.

What a strange scene ! this drenched, miserable throng of two hundred and seventy-six souls, centurion, captain, soldiers, sailors, passengers, huddled together for the last fortnight in unspeakable wretchedness and discomfort, all gathered round the calm, fearless prisoner, catching something of his spirit of faith and trust in God, and following implicitly his directions.

3. *The Soldiers' Counsel* (ch. xxvii. 38-44).

When their meal was finished, they lightened the vessel by throwing overboard her cargo of wheat, then cutting the cables and hoisting sail, they loosened the rudders and steered the vessel towards a point that seemed convenient for stranding her. But the wind and the waves were too strong ; the ship struck upon a mud-bank and began to go to pieces with the violence of the surf. And now another danger threatened. By the Roman law the soldiers were responsible with their own lives for those placed under their charge. They therefore advised that the prisoners should all be killed, in order to prevent their escape. But Julius, the centurion, anxious to save the Apostle, to whom he felt, under God, they all owed their lives, prevented this design being carried out, and gave orders that everyone who could swim, should first fling himself overboard and get to land, while the rest seized hold of planks and fragments of the wreck, and clinging to these, floated to the shore.

Thus all escaped safe to land : a motley group of drenched, weather-beaten soldiers and sailors, prisoners and passengers, standing that chill and stormy November morning upon the desolate surf-beat shore of the island of Malta, delivered out of their distress for the sake of the faithful servant of God, who was being carried a prisoner to Rome.

4. *The Viper* (ch. xxviii. 1-6).

The sight of the shipwrecked crew soon attracted the attention of the inhabitants of the island. The islanders were Phœnicians, under a Roman governor, and most ho-

pitably did they welcome the shipwrecked strangers. A large fire was soon lighted for the wet and weary travellers, probably in some cave on the shore.

The Apostle, heedless of his fatigues and the hardships he had undergone, was helping to collect fuel ; for whatever was to be done, he was never wanting, whether in counselling about a difficulty, or comforting under danger, or helping by bodily labour to relieve the general distress. While thus employed, a viper, which had been lying torpid, suddenly revived, and, irritated by the heat, darted out of the bundle of faggots he had just placed on the fire, and fastened on his hand. The islanders knew well the consequences of a bite from this deadly reptile. When they saw the venomous beast fasten on him, they whispered to one another that he must be some murderer, rescued indeed from the waves, but pursued by just vengeance even on land. The Apostle, quite undisturbed, shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

The natives watched him with eager curiosity. They expected to see the rapid swelling, the ghastly paleness, and the certain death, which usually follow upon the bite of a viper, but when they saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and, filled with awe and veneration towards him, declared him to be a god.

5. *Miracles of Healing* (ch. xxviii. 7-10).

For three months, that is, until—in the beginning of February—the sea was again open to navigation, the shipwrecked crew remained at Malta, and were treated by the natives with the greatest kindness. They were abundantly repaid for their hospitality. The father of the governor Publius was lying ill of fever ; S. Paul prayed by the bedside of the sick man, laid his hands on him, and healed him.

The rumour of this miraculous cure soon spread throughout the island, and others who had diseases came and were healed. Those same hands which had helped to work the ship and gather firewood on the shore, were now laid upon

the sick, and they recovered. Doubtless such miracles would prove to the people that the Apostle, though not a god as they had imagined, was the messenger of the One true God, and would dispose them to listen to him when he preached to them of Christ.

When the time for their departure arrived, and the shipwrecked crew embarked in another corn ship from Egypt, which had wintered in the island, the natives showed their gratitude by loading them with gifts and supplying them with everything they needed for the voyage.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. The storm was raised by God's permission by the Prince of the power of the air (Eph. ii. 2), against the ship that was carrying the Gospel to Rome. But instead of frustrating the purposes of God, it was overruled by Him for the carrying out of His designs. The ship may be compared to the Church, tossed by storms in her course over the waters of this world. These tempests try the faith, courage, and patience of God's faithful servants, and manifest the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Every tempest of persecution excited by Satan against the Church will be overruled by God for the extension of His Kingdom, the eternal welfare and happiness of His faithful servants, and the greater manifestation of His Love and Power and Glory.

2. There are those who, like the sailors in the storm, are tempted to forsake the ship, the Church, into which they have been baptised ; but to do this would be a very grievous sin ; we shall be kept from harm only on condition that we abide in the Church, and though storm and tempest may be our portion here—many troubles, many temptations—yet CHRIST is with us, and if we are faithful and obedient, we shall surely reach at last the heavenly shore.

3. Not the sailors only, but all the passengers, laboured hard and perseveringly to bring the ship to land : they cast away their earthly possessions to save their lives. We must *do each one* labour hard and perseveringly in our Christian

course, and cast out all that endangers our safety in the voyage of life, for the sake of gaining life eternal.

4. S. Paul earnestly entreated his companions by word and example to strengthen and refresh themselves with food; he took bread, blessed it, ate, and gave them to eat.

It was a beautiful figure of Holy Communion. CHRIST, the Bread of Life, alone can sustain us during the voyage of life, and strengthen us for the last plunge into the deep waters of death: that short unknown passage which must be crossed before we reach the Eternal Shore. A safe passage it will be for us if only we cling to the plank provided for us—the Cross of JESUS.

‘Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.’

NOTE.—It is interesting to notice how S. Paul's arrest in the Temple, and his appeal to Rome, were made the occasions for the more public preaching of CHRIST, and thus the fury of Satan was overruled for the glory of GOD, and the extension of the Kingdom of CHRIST.

1. To the people at Jerusalem from the stairs of the castle.
2. To the High Priest and the Sanhedrim.
3. To Felix, the Roman garrison, and the chief persons of Cæsarea.
4. To Felix and Drusilla privately.
5. To Festus at Cæsarea.
6. To Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, and the chief officers of the Court.
7. To the sailors and others on the voyage to Rome.
8. To the Governor and people of Malta.
9. To all classes at Rome, even to some who were of the household of Cæsar. Well might S. Paul say, ‘*The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel*’ (Phil. i. 12).

It has been asked why an inspired writer should have given such a lengthy and detailed account of S. Paul's voyage and shipwreck, while he passes over in silence the evangelisation of

Galatia, and compresses into a single verse three months of S. Paul's ministry at Corinth. In answer to this, it must be remembered that this voyage was the crisis of S. Luke's whole narrative. His purpose in writing the Acts of the Apostles was to trace the fulfilment of our LORD's command: '*Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*' (Acts i. 8). S. Luke wrote in Rome for Western Christendom. To show how the Gospel came there was his great object; he felt that Rome was the goal of S. Paul's course, and when he reached that city, his task would be finished.

The Greeks applied the term *barbarian* (ch. xxviii. 2, 4) to all who did not use their own language or Latin (Rom. i. 14; 1 Cor. xiv. 2; Col. iii. 11).

LESSON XLIX.

Rome.

Read Acts xxviii. 11-31. Learn 2 Cor. vi. 2 ; Heb. iv. 1, 2.

1. *The Brethren from Rome* (v. 11-15).

It was in the spring of A.D. 51 that S. Paul embarked afresh on his journey toward Rome, in the Alexandrian corn-ship 'Castor and Pollux.' Touching at Syracuse, the vessel waited three days in vain for a favourable wind, and then made a circuitous tack to Rhegium, the southern point of Italy. Here again they were detained one day, when, a favourable wind springing up, they passed swiftly through the Straits of Messina, and anchored in the harbour of Puteoli, at that time the chief port of Italy.

Here S. Paul had the happiness of finding a little body of Christians, gathered together, probably, by some of those early converts to Christianity who had been baptized into the Church from so many different quarters on the first great Whitsun-Day.

At the earnest request of these brethren, S. Paul remained among them seven days. On the eighth he again started for Rome, now only one hundred and forty miles distant. News of his approach had already reached that city, and when he arrived at Appii Forum, forty miles from Rome, he was greeted by a number of the brethren, who came to welcome him on his arrival in Italy.

The meeting must have been full of holy joy, for among those who came to cheer him on his way were probably Aquila and Priscilla, and many former friends and acquaint-

ances. When S. Paul saw this little band of Christians, '*he thanked God and took courage*' (v. 15), for nothing cheered him so much as human sympathy (2 Cor. ii. 13 ; vii. 6). No doubt he was weary with trial and suffering—perhaps tempted to despond as he thought of the mighty task that lay before him ; and therefore this token of love and sympathy would be especially cheering, reminding him that he would not be alone in that great heathen city, for that a faithful Church was there already (Rom. i. 8), probably founded by those proselyte '*strangers of Rome*' who were converted on the Day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 10), and needing only the presence of an Apostle for its complete organisation and establishment.

2. *An Ambassador in Bonds* (v. 16).

And so along the great Appian Way, the most famous of all the great Roman roads, the Apostle and his companions pursued their way, more brethren joining them at the Three Taverns, a station nearer Rome than Appii Forum.

S. Paul had seen many magnificent cities, but never one which was approached by a road so regular and costly in construction. We can fancy the glances of contemptuous curiosity cast upon the chained prisoner and his companions as they passed along with their escort of soldiers. Many military processions had entered Rome by that same gate—many victorious armies returning home in triumph—yet this poor despised prisoner was to prove a greater conqueror than Rome had ever seen, God's ambassador to the proudest city in the world (Eph. vi. 20).

And now the great desire of the Apostle is fulfilled. He is in Rome, the capital of the world, the centre of civilisation, a city steeped in luxury, abounding in magnificent buildings, the grandeur of its ruins speaking to us even now of its former greatness ; he sees on every side the most celebrated statues, the costliest works of art ; he passes the *golden milestone*, from whence thirty-one roads branch off, *leading to all parts of the Empire*.

But Rome's magnificence had no attraction for S. Paul : he saw only Rome the very sink of iniquity, its inhabitants given over to a reprobate mind ; he yearned over its multitudes filled with all unrighteousness, taking pleasure in sin, perishing for lack of knowledge of the truth (Rom. i. i.); and he burned with desire to plant the Cross of CHRIST in that stronghold of Satan.

Arrived at Rome, the Apostle was handed over by Julius the centurion to the captain of the guard, Burrus, a humane and upright officer, who saw no necessity to treat with severity a prisoner of whom he must have received a favourable account from the centurion, Julius ; one, moreover, who was not accused of any crime against Roman laws. S. Paul was therefore allowed to have a lodging of his own, and had leave to communicate with his friends both by letter and personal intercourse.

His right hand was indeed still chained to the left wrist of a Roman soldier, an infliction which it must have required great fortitude to endure patiently, and one to which he frequently alludes in his Epistles to the Ephesians, Philipians, and Colossians.

Probably his lodging would be near the barracks, that the guard might be changed easily, and as these soldiers formed the Emperor's own body-guard, by this means his case gradually became widely known. Many a soldier, learning from his lips the mysteries of the Christian faith, would repeat what he had learnt to others, and thus converts were made even among '*Cæsar's household*' (Phil. i. 13 ; iv. 22).

3. *The sect everywhere spoken against* (v. 17-31).

In accordance with his invariable custom of offering the Gospel first to his own countrymen, S. Paul, on the third day after his arrival, invited the elders of the Jews to come to him. He explained to them that he had only appealed to Cæsar because he saw no other means of obtaining his

release, assuring them that he had no intention of setting the Roman authorities against his own nation. His only offence, he told them, was that he would not give up his faith in Israel's Messiah, whom they all expected to appear, but who had indeed already come; and lifting up his chained wrist, he exclaimed, '*For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain*' (v. 20).

The elders listened, and made a cautious reply. They declared they had received no charge against the Apostle, and announced their readiness to hear what were his particular opinions, for, as concerning the sect to which he belonged, they knew that everywhere it was spoken against (v. 22).

Differences within their own pale had kindled such anger and alarm against the Jews in Rome, that less than ten years before this time all Jews had been banished from the city; and though this edict had been allowed to fall into disuse, it might at any time be enforced, and they were therefore naturally anxious not to make an enemy of one who seemed to be regarded with favour by the Roman authorities.

On the appointed day, many assembled at the Apostle's lodging, and long and earnestly, from morning till evening, S. Paul reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, earnestly appealing to them, and trying to convince them that Messiah had indeed come, and that the Kingdom of God spoken of by Daniel was already revealed. A very few appear to have been impressed. The greater number refused to believe, and the Apostle took a solemn farewell of his nation, applying to them those words of Isaiah once quoted by our LORD Himself, and sternly warning them that their blindness and deafness were sent as a punishment for the hardness of their hearts, and that the message of salvation which they, God's own people, had rejected, would henceforth be offered to the Gentiles (Isa. vi. 9, 10; S. Matt. xiii. 14, 15).

There is a peculiar solemnity in the Apostle's farewell words. He had now tried last of all, that community of Jews

which was the least likely to be ruled by the prejudices of their nation, and he had failed. This was the final rejection of the Gospel by his own nation.

The history of the Acts of the Apostles now breaks off. At each step it has shown how the Jews rejected CHRIST, and the Gentiles were grafted in (Rom. xi.). Now that this final instance has been recorded, and the progress of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome has been traced, S. Luke's work is accomplished.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. To look through and beyond the outward circumstances of our life, to GOD, who orders all, and overrules all, and who will make the most untoward circumstances to minister to the carrying out of His will, and the furtherance of His glory.

2. Each call rejected, leaves the heart harder than before. We must listen and obey the loving call of GOD now, lest the privileges we value so little are taken from us, and given to others who will make a better use of them.

3. Never to give way to gloomy cares and forebodings, but to exercise a loving trust and confidence in GOD, though all around seems dark and threatening.

LESSON L.

The Prisoner of the Lord.

Read Ephes. vi. 10-24; Phil. i. 12-30; ii. 17-30; Col. iv. 7-18; Philemon. Learn Phil. iv. 4, 6, 7; Ephes. iii. 14-19.

1. *Captivity* (Phil. ii. 17-30).

Picture S. Paul in a humble lodging in Rome, his right hand fastened with a chain to the left wrist of a Roman soldier. What a tedious existence! And this for two whole years. Think of the torture the constant close companionship of a rude, coarse Roman soldier must have been to one of his refined and sensitive nature.

He is in Rome, the goal of his hopes, the centre of life and activity, yet his ardent desires for preaching the Gospel and extending the Kingdom of CHRIST are to all appearance thwarted, frustrated. Think of what the restraint must have been to his ardent, impetuous nature. He burned to make known the message of salvation, to set up the standard of the Cross in that stronghold of Satan, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who were fast bound in misery and sin. And the tidings brought him by his faithful disciples in that humble lodging were certainly not calculated to cheer and raise his spirits. He had longed at Rome, as at Ephesus, to declare the '*whole counsel of God*,' to unfold the whole plan of salvation; yet now many of his *old enemies*, taking advantage of his imprisonment, were *preaching CHRIST*, not sincerely, but in strife and envy, *thinking to add to his troubles* (Phil. i. 15, 16); while, as if all

this were not enough, many in his beloved Asiatic Churches, deprived of his presence, were being led away by false teachers (Col. ii. 18-23). There was a time when S. Paul had found it hard to lose his will in God's will. Twice he had wrestled earnestly with God—once that the mysterious messenger of Satan who had been allowed to buffet him might depart from him (2 Cor. xii. 7-10); and again in the Temple, earnestly entreating to remain at Jerusalem and make known the message of salvation to his own countrymen (Acts xxii. 17-21)—and in neither case had God seen fit to grant His servant's prayer.

Now, there is no impatient longing to be free. Paul the aged is in bonds, but it is for CHRIST's sake: he is not the prisoner of Cæsar, but '*the prisoner of JESU CHRIST*' (Ephes. iii. 1; iv. 1). Not a word of complaint, not a murmur escapes him; his Epistles written during this time are a triumphant song of praise and thanksgiving; he thankfully acknowledges that his bonds have borne fruit even in Cæsar's palace, and have been the means of strengthening many of the brethren. He can rejoice that, whether in pretence or in truth, CHRIST is preached among the heathen (Phil. i. 12-20); and the very armour worn by the soldier to whom he is chained, furnishes him with an illustration of the perfect equipment of the Christian warrior (Ephes. vi. 13-20). He on whom rests the care of all the Churches, can exhort the Philippians to be '*careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplications to let their requests be made known unto God*'; he bids them '*Rejoice in the LORD, always,*' under all circumstances, and '*again I say, Rejoice*' (Phil. iv. 4, 6).

The Epistle to the Ephesians reveals something of the source of this perfect tranquillity; his soul enjoyed such close union with God that nothing could disturb his peace, for he had learnt to look beyond all outward circumstances to Him who overrules all, and directs all for His glory.

The Apostle was cheered in his captivity by the constant visits of his most valued disciples and fellow-workers. S. Timothy probably wrote at his dictation the Epistles to

the Philippians, Ephesians, and Colossians (Phil. i. 1; ii. 19-24; Col. i. 1; Philemon 1). Luke, '*the beloved physician*,' was with him (Col. iv. 14; Philemon 24), and Demas, who afterwards forsook him (2 Tim. iv. 10); Mark, now his trusted fellow-labourer and companion, even to the end (Col. iv. 10; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. iv. 11); Aristarchus, whom he calls his '*fellow-prisoner*' (Col. iv. 10); and Tychicus, his faithful messenger to the Churches of Ephesus (Eph. vi. 21) and Colosse (Col. iv. 7); also Epaphroditus, sent by the Philippian Church to minister to him in his necessities, and by their alms to lessen the hardships of his captivity (Phil. ii. 25; iv. 18).

Such a proof of love and devotion on the part of the Philippian Church was very cheering to the Apostle, and their messenger was very dear to him; he speaks of him as his brother, his companion in labour, his fellow-soldier; and when he fell sick, nigh unto death, he pleaded earnestly with God for his recovery, and God had mercy on him and spared S. Paul this fresh sorrow, and Epaphroditus returned to his own city, the bearer of S. Paul's Epistle to that Philippian Church he loved so deeply.

Thus not only in Rome, but throughout the whole world, S. Paul's imprisonment was made the means of extending far and wide the message of salvation, for the Epistles written by him during that time enabled him to exercise a far wider influence on the Church of CHRIST throughout the world, than if he had occupied the whole time in missionary journeys, and in founding new Churches amongst the heathen.

2. *The Runaway Slave (Philemon).*

Probably few of S. Paul's converts were of high rank. In the early days of Christianity not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called. *God chose as the instruments for establishing His Kingdom the weak things and the base things of the world, and things which are despised* (1 Cor. i. 26-29).

Amongst the humblest of S. Paul's converts at this time was Onesimus, a runaway slave belonging to Philemon, a prominent member of the Church at Colosse ; he had fled to Rome to escape the punishment of those crimes for which a heathen master would probably have condemned him to be crucified. How he was brought into contact with the Apostle we do not know. Perhaps his fellow-Colossian, Epaphras, who was at that time one of S. Paul's companions, may have met with him in the streets of Rome, and brought him to S. Paul's lodging. The Apostle received him tenderly. Degraded as he was, he saw in him a soul created in the image of God, redeemed by the precious blood of CHRIST. Onesimus was a Phrygian slave, belonging to a country whose slaves were looked upon as exceptionally worthless ; he had just robbed a kind master (Philemon 11, 18), and then run away from him. In the words of heathen writers, he was merely a 'live chattel,' 'an implement with a voice,' one who had no recognised rights.

But S. Paul converted him, and the slave became a Christian (Philemon 10) ; a brother beloved (Philemon 16), a member of CHRIST, a child of God, an heir of heaven. So dear was this son in the faith to S. Paul, that he would gladly have kept him near himself (Philemon 13), but it was his duty to go back to the master he had wronged. S. Paul therefore bade him return with a letter of intercession from himself to Philemon.

He had no power or authority to set Onesimus free. Christianity did not at once emancipate the slave, but it established the truths that made slavery endurable, and which would, if faithfully practised, eventually put an end to slavery altogether. In a Christian community in those early times, a slave might be a bishop, while his master was only a catechumen (one under instruction for baptism) ; and S. Paul bids the Corinthians pay due respect and submission to the household of Stephanas, though some of the *Corinthians* were people of good position, and these were

slaves (1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16). Had Philemon been a heathen, Onesimus would have returned to certain torture ; he would have been branded as a runaway slave, and either worked in chains in a slave-prison, or been crucified. But S. Paul felt sure that in this case the runaway was sure of forgiveness, and of being treated with the most considerate kindness. What was the result of S. Paul's intercession we are not told (Philemon 12-20), but surely Philemon, the beloved friend of the Apostle, one whom he habitually remembered in his prayers (v. 4), and in whose love he had great joy (v. 7), must have been moved by his touching appeal, and gladly received Onesimus, no longer as a slave, but as a brother beloved in the LORD (v. 16). The house of Philemon to which Onesimus returned is mentioned as still standing by a writer in the fifth century, and as regarded with affectionate memory by the faithful.

3. *Paul the aged.*

At the end of two years S. Paul was liberated. We have no particulars of his trial before the Emperor, but that it ended in his release is evident from the historical notices in the Epistles to S. Timothy and to Titus, and also from the statements of the early Fathers. S. Clement, his friend and contemporary (Phil. iv. 3), says that he went to the 'extremity of the West' before his martyrdom.

Many passages in S. Paul's Epistles, written during his detention at Rome, declare his full persuasion that he would be shortly acquitted. He asks Philemon to prepare him a lodging, for he trusts that through his prayers he shall be given unto him (Philemon 22). He tells the Philippians (ch. i. 25), that he is confident he shall abide and continue with them, and that he expects shortly to visit them in person (ch. i. 26 ; ii. 24).

Few and scanty are the records of the footsteps of S. Paul *during the next five years*. Bent with toil, suffering, and *persecution*, yet burning with zeal for his Master's glory, and *for the salvation of souls*, 'Paul the aged' extended his travels

even to the uttermost bounds of the West. History speaks of his preaching the Gospel in Spain, and tradition adds that our own country has been hallowed by the footsteps of the blessed Apostle. He may have heard of the Isles of the West, from some of Cæsar's household, for it is said that the Claudia mentioned in 2 Tim. iv. 21 was the grand-daughter of the British chief Caractacus, who was carried prisoner to Rome, and that she married a Roman senator named Pudens, who returned with her to Britain, carrying with them the glad tidings of the Gospel.

After his mission in the far West, S. Paul probably went with S. Timothy to Jerusalem, as he had designed to do (Heb. xiii. 23). On his way from the West to Jerusalem he probably sailed by Crete, and left Titus there as bishop of that half-savage island (Tit. i. 5). He may then have paid his promised visit to Philemon at Colosse (Philemon 22), and on his way to Macedonia left S. Timothy at Ephesus as its bishop and chief pastor (1 Tim. i. 3). It is not likely that S. Paul actually visited Ephesus, for he had expressly foretold at Miletus that the faithful in that city should see his face no more (Acts xx. 25). Journeying westward, he probably paid his promised visit to his dearly-loved Church at Philippi (Phil. ii. 24), and from thence passed to Nicopolis in Epirus, where he appears to have spent the winter (Tit. iii. 12).

Inspired with earnest solicitude and vehement desire for the spiritual welfare of the Churches, which he foresaw would soon be deprived of his presence and fatherly care, S. Paul now wrote his first Epistle to Timothy, and the Epistle to Titus. These pastoral Epistles are, as it were, a sacred manual, bequeathed by the Apostle to the Church for her guidance and government in all ages.

After wintering at Nicopolis, S. Paul seems to have visited Corinth, where he left Erastus in charge, and thence passed on to Miletus, where his companion Trophimus fell sick (2 Tim. iv. 20). Here probably Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, came to meet him, and here, or in the neighbourhood of Ephesus, S. Paul was finally arrested—perhaps through

the malice of those Asiatic Jews who had formerly united with Demetrius the silversmith against him ; and who had afterwards pursued him to Jerusalem, and stirred up the multitude against him (Acts xix. 23, 33 ; xxi. 27-29 ; 2 Tim. iv. 14.) If this is so, it will account for the touching farewell between S. Paul and his beloved disciple ; the bitterness of the approaching separation, after fifteen years of fellowship in labour and suffering, bringing from the eyes of Timothy a flood of tears (2 Tim. i. 4). On the way to Rome the prisoner and his guards touched at Troas, and here S. Paul deposited some of his property in safe custody with Carpus (2 Tim. iv. 13). Finally, after a toilsome journey, he reached Rome, a prisoner for the second time.

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. Christianity, though it teaches the universal brotherhood of man, was never intended to abolish all social distinctions. The Epistles are full of practical exhortations on the mutual duties of rulers and subjects, masters and servants, rich and poor, parents and children, &c. In God's kingdom of nature there is variety of soil, and diversity of landscape ; every flower on the earth, every star in the heavens differs one from another. There is an endless variety in the faces and in the minds of men ; all have not the same gifts, graces, or powers ; but each must, according to his ability, fulfil the particular work for which God has fitted him. In heaven itself there are degrees of glory, and different orders and ranks in the heavenly hierarchy.

2. To cultivate at all times a spirit of thankfulness and holy joy, remembering S. Paul's exhortation, written from his prison at Rome, to 'rejoice in the LORD alway.'

3. To love every soul, however sinful, because it is created in the image of God, and redeemed with the precious blood of CHRIST ; never to give up any one as hopeless, for the precious blood of JESUS can wash away the foulest stains of sin, and the grace of GOD can change the vilest sinner into a glorious saint.

4. To offer frequent thanksgivings to God for the great blessing of Christianity, and to do all in our power to extend its blessed influence, till the earth is full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isa. xi. 9).

NOTE.—Slaves under the Roman Empire were treated with the utmost cruelty. As in most cities they far outnumbered the free population, they had to be kept in subjection by laws of terrible severity. The house of a wealthy Roman contained hundreds of slaves of every rank and nation. The master might kill or torture his slaves with impunity, but if one of them raised a hand against his oppressor, the whole household of slaves, together with their wives and children, were put to a cruel death. Less than two years before S. Paul's first imprisonment at Rome, no less than four hundred of every age and of both sexes had been executed by the Emperor's orders, to avenge the death of their master, a prefect of the city, who had been murdered by one of his slaves. The most trifling faults were punished with the utmost barbarity. If a slave girl did not arrange her lady's dress to please her, she was frequently branded with a hot iron. If a slave when waiting at table accidentally dropped a crystal vase, he might be flung at once into his master's fish-pond. The gladiator, who lived only for the amusement of the populace, was forced to take a horrible oath that he would allow himself to be bound, burned, beaten, or killed at his owner's will. Such was slavery in S. Paul's time. No wonder that from Cæsar's household downwards, many in this condition rejoiced to find in Christianity a light and peace from heaven which enabled them to bear with patience their hard lot, and cheered them with a sure hope of eternal happiness hereafter.

Epaphroditus had been appointed by S. Paul to preside over the Church at Philippi; the word translated '*messenger*' (Phil. ii. 25) being more correctly '*Apostle*.' He was the bishop of the Philippian Church.

LESSON LI.

The Crown of Martyrdom.

Read 2 Tim. i. ; iv. 6-22 ; S. John xxi. 10-22. *Learn* 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12 ; iv. 6-8.

1. *The Burning of Rome.*

S. Paul reached Rome when the persecution of Nero against the Christians was at its height. During the five years of his absence, the number of Christians had greatly increased, and the Church at Rome had become fully established under S. Peter, and Linus its first Bishop.

Nero, the Roman Emperor, who was perhaps the greatest monster this world has ever seen, had out of wanton cruelty, and a desire to behold a conflagration on a large scale, ordered his own city to be set on fire. So quickly did the flames spread, that out of the fourteen quarters into which Rome was divided, only four escaped. It is said that Nero enjoyed the horrible spectacle from the top of a high tower, where he appeared in the dress of an actor, reciting verses and playing the violin, while Rome was being laid in ashes.

Finding, however, that this crime had so exasperated his subjects that they were on the point of rising in rebellion against him, he charged the crime upon the Christians, and thus turned the fury of the people against them. Terrible were the sufferings to which they were in consequence *exposed*. Some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts *and worried to death* by dogs ; many were thrown to the *wild beasts in the amphitheatre* ; others were crucified ; others

wrapped in shirts covered with pitch and set on fire when the day closed, to furnish lights for the games and sports that were being held, their tormentors trying to add to their sufferings by every form of insult and mockery. Nero lent his own gardens for this horrible entertainment, mixing in the crowd in the dress of a charioteer, or looking on at the spectacle from his chariot.

2. *The Dungeon* (2 Tim. i. 15-18).

S. Paul's second imprisonment at Rome was very different from the first. He was now a fettered prisoner, thrust into the Mamertine dungeon, a low circular vault underground, a loathsome and frightful place, entered by an aperture above. No one could visit him now except at the peril of his life, and one by one many of his friends seem to have deserted him. The first to leave him were Phygellus and Hermogenes, with several others from Asia (2 Tim. i. 15); then Demas forsook him, '*having loved this present world*' (2 Tim. iv. 10), terrified probably by the fearful scenes that were daily taking place. S. Luke, his constant companion, stood by him, and Onesiphorus, an Ephesian convert, gladly encountered danger and scorn in the earnest search which at last brought him to the side of the Apostle, who speaks gratefully of the services he rendered him. It is probable, from the greeting that S. Paul sends to the household of Onesiphorus, that his courage and faithfulness cost him his life, and won for him the martyr's crown (2 Tim. i. 16-18).

3. *The Trial* (2 Tim. iv. 6-11).

Again the Apostle stands before a Roman tribunal, this time probably before the Emperor himself. Of the particulars of that trial we are not told, we only know that he stood there alone—'*No man stood with me, but all forsook me; I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding, the LORD stood with me and strengthened me*' (2 Tim. iv. 16, 17). His chief accuser appears to have been Alexander the copper-smith, the same who may have been the cause of his arrest,

and would therefore have followed him to Rome to witness against him (2 Tim. iv. 14, 15).

But He who stood by and strengthened His faithful servant, enabled him so to speak that even his judges could not condemn him. Once more, before that great assembly the Gospel message was fully proclaimed. The Precious Blood could have cleansed even the monster Nero had he repented. But Nero was too hardened in crime to be touched by the Apostle's words. The judges retired to deliberate; perhaps there was some deficiency in the evidence, some flaw in the indictment, for the trial was postponed, and the prisoner returned to his dungeon, delivered for the time '*out of the mouth of the lion*' (2 Tim. iv. 17).

Follow S. Paul to his dungeon, and see him writing his last precious thoughts to his beloved son in the faith (in the Second Epistle to S. Timothy). Does he complain of his hardships? Oh, no! His last words are a song of triumph; he is '*ready to be offered,*' longing eagerly for the martyr's crown. He has '*fought the good fight,*' he has '*finished his course,*' he has '*kept the faith,*' the precious treasure entrusted to him, and now the goal is in view, the crown almost won (2 Tim. iv. 6-8). He exhorts S. Timothy to be strong in the '*grace that is in CHRIST JESUS,*' to '*endure hardness,*' reminding him that if we suffer with CHRIST we shall also reign with Him (2 Tim. ii. 1, 3, 12).

Yet in the judgment of the world, how little cause there was for triumph. Take only the latter years of the great Apostle's life. Four years of imprisonment, two at Cesarea, two at Rome; then five years of harassing cares and anxieties, the organisation and establishment of the different Churches he had founded resting mainly on him. Added to this the Churches he so loved were torn by heresies and strife; many who once were fervent and devoted disciples had fallen away at the touchstone of persecution; while, to crown all, there rose before him the gloomy dungeon; and the headsmen's axe.

But was this to be the end of his labours and sufferings?

Oh, no ! To the eye of faith there was the assurance of a plenteous harvest, for '*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*' There was the joy of being counted worthy to attain the martyr's crown, to enter for ever into the joy of the LORD, to see the King in His beauty, to stand before the Throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His Temple (Rev. vii. 15).

4. *The Crown* (2 Tim. iv. 13-22).

The great Apostle has one earthly desire yet unfulfilled : it is to see his beloved Timothy once more. He urges him to come at once, to come before winter, to come ere it is too late, and receive his blessing before he dies (2 Tim. iv. 9, 11, 21).

Did S. Timothy and S. Mark ever see S. Paul again ? Did they bring with them those few possessions the Apostle had left at Troas in the care of Carpus—the cloak, and the parchments, and the vellum rolls ? (Tim. iv. 13). What a precious bequest those possessions would have been ! Perhaps the cloak was one which S. Paul had woven himself from the black goat's-hair of his native province. Perhaps it was an old companion in his many journeys, and, worn though it was, it would have been a comfort to him in the cold dungeon. And perhaps the parchments were precious rolls of Holy Scripture—the Prophets and the Psalms—which would have inspired and cheered his soul, and made the dark dungeon bright with heavenly light. We cannot tell whether S. Paul and his beloved son in the faith ever met again. For the last time the aged Apostle stands at an earthly tribunal, in the presence of a hostile crowd of Jews and Pagans ; and now he is condemned to die, and the judge pronounces sentence against him. As a Roman citizen he is spared the death of the cross, and is sentenced to be beheaded. The road hallowed by his last footsteps may still be traced. Accompanied by the soldiers, and the centurion who was to see the sentence executed, S. Paul leaves the

city by the gate now called by his name, and about three miles from Rome, not far from the Ostian road, on a green and level spot now called the 'Tre Fontane,' the word of command to halt is given. The prisoner kneels down, the sword flashes in the air, and the next moment the Apostle is welcomed into the presence of the LORD and Master he had served so faithfully to the end. Oh! what joy to exchange the hootings of the rabble for the angels' song of welcome: '*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy LORD.*'

'*Blessed are the dead which die in the LORD: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them*' (Rev. xiv. 13). S. Paul's works will not cease to follow him till the great Day of Doom. Then only will it be made known how many saints have, like S. Augustine, been gathered in through the inspired words that fell from the lips of the great Apostle.

5. '*The glorious company of the Apostles praise Thee.*'

Tradition tells us that S. Peter and S. Paul received the martyr's crown on the same day. S. Peter also had suffered imprisonment in the dreary Mamertine dungeon, and when there had probably written his Second Epistle. It is said that S. Peter, having converted his gaoler, was set free by him, and that as he was leaving Rome by the Appian Way, he saw in the moonlight a figure approaching, and recognised his Divine Master bearing His Cross, as He had done thirty-five years before at Jerusalem. '*Lord, whither goest Thou?*' exclaimed the Apostle. '*I go to Rome,*' was the answer, '*to be crucified afresh,*' and the vision disappeared. S. Peter returned at once to his bonds: he was ready to follow his Master now to prison and to death. Brought out at length to die the death of the cross, the aged Apostle entreated that he might be crucified with his head downwards, not deeming himself worthy to die like the Master whom he had once denied. His request was granted.

Probably by this date (A.D. 68) nearly all the Apostles had glorified God by their deaths.

S. James, Bishop of Jerusalem, called the Just, even by the Jews, and held in high honour and reverence for his holy life and continual prayers, had been seized by the sect of the Zealots, at the time of the Passover, placed on a pinnacle of the Temple, and required to deny his Lord, and declare Him to be an impostor, in the presence of the multitude who thronged the courts below. *'Why do you ask me concerning JESUS?'* was his reply. *'He sitteth at the right hand of God, from whence He shall return to judge the quick and the dead.'* His persecutors, enraged at his answer, cast him down from the pinnacle. He was not killed by the fall, but, kneeling down, prayed for his murderers, and while thus engaged, a man came behind him and beat out his brains with a fuller's club. His brother Simeon became Bishop in his stead.

S. Andrew, after preaching among the Scythians and Thracians, was suspended on a cross of olive-wood in the form of an X, by order of the pro-consul Egeas, who commanded that he should be fastened to the cross with cords, that his death might be the more lingering and tedious. On coming within sight of the cross, S. Andrew exclaimed in a transport of love, *'Hail precious Cross, that hast been consecrated by the body of my LORD, and adorned with His limbs as with rich jewels ! I come to thee exulting and glad; receive me with joy into thy arms, O good Cross, that hast received beauty from our LORD's limbs: I have ardently loved thee; long have I desired and sought thee; now thou art found by me, and art made ready for my longing soul. Receive me into thy arms, take me from among men, and present me to my Master; that He who redeemed me on thee may receive me by thee.'*

For two days he hung upon his cross, teaching and exhorting the crowds who gathered round him to constancy and perseverance in that religion which he had delivered to them. The Christians entreated the governor to spare the

Apostle's life, but S. Andrew prayed our Lord to let him depart, and seal his confession of the faith with his blood. His prayer was heard, and on the last day of November he attained the martyr's crown.

S. Philip is said to have been crucified at Hierapolis, in Phrygia.

S. Bartholomew became the Apostle of Persia and India, where, after the lapse of a century, a Hebrew copy of S. Matthew's Gospel was found, marking the sphere of his labours. He is said to have suffered a death of terrible torture in Great Armenia, being flayed alive.

S. Matthew is supposed to have suffered a violent death in Ethiopia..

S. Thomas founded a flourishing Church in the recesses of India, and was put to death by the Brahmins, being pierced with a lance.

S. Jude is said to have suffered in Persia, pierced with arrows while bound to a cross.

S. Simon probably suffered martyrdom with S. Jude.

Of S. Matthias, nothing certain is known. According to one account he was crucified in Cappadocia, while another tradition asserts that he was stoned to death by his own countrymen in Judea.

S. Barnabas, after overcoming the Jews in argument at Salamis, was shut up in their synagogue and at night stoned to death.

Thus, in all probability, did all the Apostles, with the exception of S. John, follow their Lord and Master through the Red Sea of martyrdom, baptized with His baptism of suffering, but not until '*their sound had gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world.*'

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative :—

1. *The Twelve Apostles are the first princes and leaders of CHRIST's army. Who follows in their train? All who in their several callings and different degrees strive and suffer,*

and live and die in the Faith, and they who suffer shall reign with Him.

The Church in these her princes boasts,
These victor-chiefs of warrior hosts ;
The soldiers of the heavenly hall,
The lights that rose on earth for all.

'Twas thus the yearning faith of Saints,
The unconquered hope that never faints,
The love of Christ that knows not shame,
The Prince of this world overcame.

2. The Saints in glory are one with us in the Communion of Saints ; we are all members of CHRIST's mystical Body, united to the same Head JESUS CHRIST, indwelt by the same Holy Spirit. The Saints in glory are not unmindful of us their brethren in the Church Militant on earth ; they are a great cloud of witnesses about our path (Heb xii. 1), cheering us by their example, helping us by their prayers, ready to welcome us at the gates of Paradise (Rev. viii. 3).

'Make us to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting.'

3. So to live that we may be able to say on our death-bed, '*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the Faith,*' that Faith which, as a precious deposit, has been confided to the guardianship of the Church, that Faith which, 'except every one do keep whole and undefiled : without doubt he shall perish everlastingly' (Athan. Creed).

LESSON LII.

The Last Days of the Beloved Apostle.

Read S. Luke xxi. 5-24 ; S. John xxi. 20-23 ; Rev. i. Learn S. John i. 1-4, 14 ; Rev. i. 7 ; xxii. 20.

1. *The Fall of Jerusalem* (S. Luke xxi. 5-24).

Nearly forty years have passed since that awful day when the LORD of Glory was crucified on Mount Calvary, and the Jews, instead of profiting by the long-suffering of God, and using this time for repentance, rejected His repeated offers of grace, killed His messengers, and persecuted His Church.

Now they had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and the doom they had pronounced upon themselves, '*His blood be on us and on our children*' (S. Matt. xxvii. 25), was about to be fulfilled.

The exactions and tyranny of their Roman governors at length drove the Jews into open rebellion. In their first encounter with the Roman legions they were victorious, and, elated by their success, they were more than ever determined to throw off the Roman yoke, believing that the true Messiah was about to appear, and that God would destroy their enemies, as in old time He had destroyed the hosts of Pharaoh and of Sennacherib.

The few Christians who remained in Jerusalem thought *otherwise*. False Christs were deceiving the people saying : "*Lo ! here is CHRIST ; or, Lo ! he is there.*" Strange portents *related* by Josephus, the Jewish historian—signs in the

heaven above, and in the earth beneath, as if to warn this infatuated race of coming destruction. A star like a fiery sword is said to have hung over the city for a whole year, the brazen gate of the Temple opened of its own accord, and on the night preceding the Feast of Pentecost, when the priests entered the Temple, the earth quaked, the veil which shrouded the Holy of Holies was rent, and from behind the winged cherubim the sound as of a departing host was heard; while a voice from the mysterious darkness exclaimed, '*Let us depart hence*' (comp. Ezek. x. 18, 19; xi. 22, 23). The city itself was torn by contending factions; bands of robbers, calling themselves Zealots, desecrated and profaned the Holy of Holies, while Jerusalem itself was '*compassed with armies*.'

Warned by these signs of approaching evil, that the end must be nigh, Simeon and his Christian flock fled from the city as their LORD had commanded them, and took refuge at a little town in the mountains beyond the Jordan, called Pella, leaving not one of their number to endure the horrors of the siege. The war lasted three years, the Roman army gradually reducing and devastating the whole country, most of the inhabitants perishing miserably.

Soon after the death of the wretched Nero, Vespasian, the Roman general, was recalled to Rome and made Emperor, leaving his son Titus in command of the forces engaged in the siege of Jerusalem. The horrors of that siege are unequalled in history; the city itself was completely shut in by the Roman army, and all means of obtaining provisions were cut off. The famine became unendurable. The terrible prophecy of Deut. xxviii. 56, 57 was literally fulfilled.

The Jews themselves were divided into fierce contending factions, who fought against one another until the streets flowed with blood. The conquerors at last fought their way in, and fire and sword completed the utter desolation of Jerusalem. Titus wished to spare the beautiful Temple, but a firebrand cast through the window by a soldier, kindled

the cedar-wood, and, as the flames rose rapidly, one universal cry of horror burst from the Jews, who gazed with dismay upon their burning Temple, and felt that God had indeed forsaken them.

No less than 1,100,000 are said to have perished in the siege, while 97,000 prisoners were carried into exile, many of whom were sold for slaves, while the remainder were reserved to be devoured by wild beasts in the amphitheatre, or sent to work in the stone quarries of Egypt for life. The city was entirely destroyed according to our LORD's prophecy ; not one stone remained upon another, its very site was ploughed up (S. Matt. xxiv. 2).

By the fall of Jerusalem, the Mosaic worship and ritual came to an end, for its sacrifices could no longer be offered, nor its rites performed. After the final destruction of the ancient worship, we are told by Eusebius, a very early historian of the Church, that all the disciples and surviving kinsmen of our LORD assembled under the leadership of S. John, the beloved Apostle, to consult as to the future organisation of the Church.

Probably the fulfilment of our LORD's dying charge, the care of His blessed Mother, had kept S. John at Jerusalem while she remained on earth. No details of this period of her life have come down to us. Doubtless it was too sacred for human eyes to gaze upon, but tradition tells us that she lived for fifteen years after the Crucifixion in holy seclusion and contemplation, a Mother to the infant Church, guarding and shielding it by her prayers, and that from her lips S. Luke gathered all his details of the sacred infancy of our blessed LORD.

2. *Sowing Tares.*

The fall of Jerusalem was followed by a time of comparative rest, but directly persecution ceased, the enemy of man *was busy sowing tares among the wheat*. The first heresy *which disturbed the peace of the early Church was that of the Gnostics*. These false teachers proclaimed that our LORD *was a mere man, upon whom a heavenly Being*

descended at His baptism, enabling Him to work miracles, and deserting Him at His crucifixion. Against this deadly heresy, S. John's writings are chiefly directed; many passages in his Epistles and Gospel directly contradict this awful blasphemy, and proclaim clearly and fully the Divinity of our blessed LORD, and the Mystery of the Incarnation (S. John i. 1-18; 18-23'; viii. 58; x. 30; xix. 33-35; xx. 28; 1st Epistle i. 1, 2; ii. 18, 19, 22; iv. 1-3; 2nd Epistle 7, 10, 11).

Soon after the martyrdom of S. Paul, S. Timothy had suffered a cruel death at Ephesus; and thenceforward S. John appears to have lived chiefly at Ephesus; and assumed the chief direction of the Seven Churches; Simeon, the son of Cleophas, having been appointed Bishop of Jerusalem in the room of his martyred brother.

It was at Ephesus that on one occasion S. John met Cerinthus, a well-known Gnostic teacher, in one of the public baths, whereupon he fled at once from the building, declaring he could not remain in the same place with the enemy of his LORD and Master. In those early days there was no tampering with heresy and unbelief; no Christian dared to accept or reject as he chose, certain articles of the faith; those who caused divisions were to be avoided; the sin of schism was strongly condemned; all were exhorted to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints (Rom. xvi. 17; 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14; S. Jude 2, 19, 20).

3. *The Second Persecution.*

For ten or eleven years, during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus, the Christians were unmolested, but when Titus was succeeded by his wicked and cruel brother Domitian, a furious persecution broke forth. Hearing that some of the royal line of David still survived, and fearing lest they might persuade the Jews to rebel against him, the Emperor ordered them to be brought before him. They were the two sons of S. Jude, poor men and accustomed to hard work; and when he saw their rough hands and worn garments, and heard them declare that, though children of David, they looked not for an earthly, but a heavenly kingdom, he turned away from them, treating them as fools, and

allowed them to return home. S. John, as chief of the persecuted Christians, was arrested at Ephesus, and brought to Rome. The cruel Emperor commanded that he should suffer a death of unheard-of torture, by being lowered into a caldron of boiling oil. The tyrant's orders were obeyed. Outside the Latin Gate of the city the barbarous torture was inflicted, but, to the amazement of his persecutors, the aged Apostle emerged unhurt. The fire had no power over him, for his work was not yet accomplished.

By the Emperor's order, he was then banished to the Isle of Patmos, a small rocky island in the Ægean Sea (see map), little more than a barren rock, where the Romans transported their criminals.

4. *The Exile of Patmos* (Rev. i.).

On this wild and desolate spot, far from all his fellow-Christians, S. John was not alone. There, '*in the Spirit on the LORD'S Day*' (Rev. i. 10), he sees the heavens opened, and beholds in glory the Master whom he so loves. That radiant Form is no stranger to him, for He is '*One like unto the Son of Man*' (v. 13). Yet so glorious is the Vision, that the beloved disciple, who leaned on His breast at supper, and stood beneath His Cross, now falls at '*His feet as dead*.'

Revived and strengthened by the touch of that Right Hand, and the familiar words, '*Fear not*' (v. 17), the Apostle is privileged to receive the solemn messages from the great Head of the Church, intended not for the Seven Churches of Asia alone, but for the guidance, instruction, and encouragement of the Church to the end of time. There the heavenly worship also is revealed to him, the pattern upon which the ritual of the Christian Church was to be founded, as that of the Jewish Church had been upon the pattern shown to Moses in the Mount of God (Exod. xxv. 40).

Mysterious visions foreshadowing the future of the Church and of the world were also revealed to him, extending from *his own days* to those when the '*Lamb as it had been slain*' (ch. v. 6) shall sit upon the great white Throne to judge *both the quick and the dead* (ch. xx. 11-15).

5. Last Days at Ephesus.

After the persecution was over, the aged Apostle was released, and returned to his beloved Church at Ephesus, where he moulded the worship of the Church on what he had beheld in heaven, and gave the outline of the Liturgy or form of worship for the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist, that the Church Militant on earth might unite with the Church Triumphant in heaven, in offering the great memorial sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour. There is a tradition that the aged Apostle was accustomed to celebrate the Holy Mysteries in a mitre and vestments, somewhat similar to those worn by the Jewish High Priests, and these were passed on as the pattern for the Christian Priesthood.

Many beautiful stories are told of the latter days of the beloved Apostle. It is said that on one occasion, when visiting Smyrna, he was much struck with the fair countenance and devout bearing of a youth among his hearers, and earnestly commended him to the special care of the bishop, who promised to be to him all that the Apostle could desire. After a time, however, he unhappily relaxed his care and vigilance, and the young man, yielding to evil companions, fell away from the faith, gave himself up to riotous living, and at length became the chief of one of the wild bands of robbers who infested the country.

After a time S. John revisited the city, and asked the bishop, 'Where is the jewel which I committed to thy care—the young man whose soul is precious as that of a brother?' The bishop replied sadly, 'He is dead to God; he has forsaken the Church, and become a robber and the captain of robbers.'

Then the Apostle, sorely grieved, rent his clothes, and rode alone to the mountain infested by the robbers. He soon fell into their hands, and was led by them before their captain. As soon as the young man saw that pure and loving face, he attempted to flee in an agony of shame and remorse; but S. John cried after him, 'Dost thou flee from me thy aged father? How wilt thou flee from thy Judge at the last day? Willingly would I die for thee. Stay, &c

CHRIST has sent me.' That loving entreaty pierced the soul of the young man ; he threw away his weapons, and fell at the feet of the Apostle weeping bitterly, trying only to conceal his right hand wherewith he had wrought wickedness. But the Apostle, seizing that right hand, kissed it, as cleansed by the tears of repentance, and brought this lost sheep a true penitent back to the fold. He did not leave him until he had been fully forgiven by God and man, and restored to the communion of the faithful—an example of true repentance, risen from the death of sin to the life of righteousness.

S. John lived on at Ephesus to extreme old age. Before he died, all the bishops of Asia, and delegates from every Church, entreated him to write a fourth Gospel for the confirmation of the faith, and the confusion of heresy ; for the Gnostics and other heretics now boldly denied both the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and taught that our blessed LORD was but a divinely-inspired human teacher. S. John, after directing that a solemn fast and supplication for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit should be observed throughout the Church, took up his pen, and, filled with the Holy Spirit, wrote those wonderful words, '*In the beginning was the Word,*' &c. His Gospel completely refutes every heresy that has ever risen to disturb the Church, by its plain teaching upon the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Sacraments, which are the extension of the Incarnation, and the channels of its benefits to us ; and also by his detailed account of the events succeeding the Resurrection, showing plainly that our blessed LORD's Body was no phantom, as the heretics impiously affirmed, but that '*He is perfect God and perfect Man : of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting*' (Athan. Creed).

After he had attained his hundredth year, his strength failed him, but he was often carried in a litter into the Church, where, raising his feeble hands, the beloved Apostle would say to the assembled congregation, '*Little children, love one another.*' At length the gentle hand of death was upon the 'disciple whom JESUS loved.' Long years had he

waited patiently for that call, and when at last he fell asleep in JESUS, his departure was so gentle many refused to believe that he was really dead, and circulated the wildest legends about him, long after he had been welcomed into the ranks of that great multitude around the Throne whom he had seen in vision when a lonely exile in Patmos. '*Even so come, LORD JESUS.*'

Lessons to be drawn from the Narrative:—

1. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation ; God's Holy Spirit will not always strive with man ; we must each one make the most of our opportunities now, while the day of grace lasts, for we know not how soon the day of reckoning may come.

2. To contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered unto the saints, doing all in our power to win back to the Church those who have wandered away from the fold, probably through no fault of their own.

3. Great reverence and devotion towards the Blessed Sacraments.

The worship of the Church Militant on earth is the echo of the worship of the Church Triumphant in Heaven. The great central act of worship of the Christian Church is the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist ; the very words and the ceremonial in use have come down to us from the earliest times, and should help us to realise that we are uniting with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven in offering the great memorial sacrifice, the Lamb as it had been slain, Who is ever pleading in Heaven and on earth His one all-prevailing Sacrifice.

4. To be true disciples of the Apostle of Love, loving one another '*not in word neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth*' (1 John iii. 18), keeping ourselves from idols, loving God above all (1 John v. 21), and '*abiding in Him*' (1 John ii. 28) by a faithful use of the Sacraments which are the channels of His grace, and by diligently striving to walk in His footsteps ; that when we hear Him saying, '*Behold I come quickly,*' we may answer with joy, '*Even so come, LORD JESUS.*'

ADDITIONAL NOTE.

The Successors of the Apostles.

We have seen that the Apostles, divinely inspired in all they did, fixed their head-quarters in certain chosen spots, such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome—all of them populous, busy cities, well adapted to become great mission centres from which the Church might spread in every direction. In every place where a Christian community had been gathered together, a Church was thoroughly organised and established by the ordination of elders, or presbyters, and the consecration of overseers or bishops.

These successors of the Apostles received from them all the spiritual gifts with which they themselves had been entrusted, and which were to be transmitted through the laying-on of hands to the end of time. Thus S. Timothy was ordained Bishop of Ephesus, Titus Bishop of Crete, Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna, S. Mark Bishop of Alexandria, Linus Bishop of Rome; most of the remaining fellow-labourers of S. Paul presiding over the different Churches he had founded. Those who thus held the first rank in the Apostolical succession took the greatest pains to build up the Church on the foundations which the Apostles had laid, and in their turn ordained others to carry on the work. The documents tracing the true succession of the Bishops of the Church from the Apostles themselves, have in every age been most carefully preserved, and there is not the slightest difficulty in the present day in tracing the succession of the English Church from the present Archbishop of Canterbury to S. Augustine, and from him in a direct line to Linus, who was in all probability consecrated Bishop of Rome by S. Peter.

The Acts of the Apostles is an epitome of Church History. In it we see the laws by which CHRIST our Sovereign LORD works, we see what He has done, and we learn what He will continue to do even to the end. Persecution, heresy, and infidelity will ever threaten the Church as they did even in the days of the Apostles, but no weapon formed against her shall prosper (Isa. liv. 17); the powers of the world may oppress her—the Spirits of Darkness may be leagued against her, but He who ascended into heaven, and reigns in Majesty on high, still works in her and by her. He is in the midst of her, therefore she shall not be removed—He is her hope and strength, a very present help in trouble.

All persecutions from without, all perils from within, will be overruled by the power of CHRIST, to the triumph of His Gospel. The gates of hell can never prevail against the Church. The fierceness of man will turn to the praise of God (Ps. lxxvi. 10); all the weapons of the enemy will recoil against those who use them, and be made instrumental for the promotion of CHRIST's glory. Though our lot may be cast in days of doubt, rebuke and blasphemy, we need not faint and falter. The nearer Satan is, the nearer CHRIST is; the more fiercely Satan rages, the more gloriously will CHRIST conquer. An unseen Hand regulates all, and overrules even hindrances to the furtherance of His plans, and the eventual triumph of His Church. Therefore will we not fear though the earth be moved, and the hills be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof rage and swell, and the mountains shake at the tempest of the same; the rivers of the flood thereof shall make glad the city of God. The LORD of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge (Ps. xlv.).

CHRIST is gone up; yet ere He passed
From earth in heaven to reign,
He formed one holy Church to last
Till He should come again.

His twelve Apostles first He made
His ministers of grace ;
And they their hands on others laid;
To fill in turn their place.

So age by age, and year by year,
His grace was handed on ;
And still the holy Church is here,
Although her LORD is gone.

Let those find pardon, LORD, from Thee,
Whose love to her is cold ;
Bring wanderers in, and let there be
One shepherd and one fold.

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